

# A DROP IN INFINITY

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BY GERALD GROGAN



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# *A Drop in Infinity*

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## CHAPTER I

I CONCEIVE that what I am about to narrate would be incomplete were I not to say, in the first place, how I came to be in Poltyack. For this reason I begin my story under slight difficulties. I cannot explain satisfactorily how I came to be in Poltyack.

. . . . .

The manner of my coming to Poltyack was as follows. On my twenty-sixth birthday I received two letters. One was from a solicitor announcing that my late Aunt Wilhelmina Thorpe—the last of my near relations—had left me a magnificent fortune of £115 7s. 11d., which now lay at my disposal at the said solicitor's office. The other letter informed me that Messrs. Grindle & Pennywhistle, Chartered Accountants, regretfully dispensed with my services, and at the same time expressed a coy hope that I would be kind enough to consider this letter in the light of the customary notice.

My dismissal was due to gross incompetence, and I was quite well aware of the fact. This thing had happened so many times—so very

many times before. It did not take much of an effort to realise that I was now comfortably and finally branded as a failure.

Cheerful thought! Anyhow I had £115 7s. 11d., which, although the last unearned increment which I—bar miracles—would receive, might yet take a little spending. The idea of living on the money whilst I hunted for other employment was naturally my first thought, but I dismissed it. “You know what the end will be,” thought I to myself, “so why prolong the agony?” I saw a dreary vista of long years through which I drifted, feebly struggling perhaps, but always in the grip of the current, to the last plunge which should cascade me, old and broken, through the hospitable doors of the workhouse.

“Better than that,” I said, “is it to fail more gloriously in a briefer space of time. I will blow Aunt Wilhelmina’s legacy and die.”

And so I should have done, had not the Providence which amusingly chooses to take special care of a fool—Well, I shall not anticipate myself in my story.

My actions during the next few weeks shook the sane traditions of the Thorpe family to the foundations. Instead of working out my notice, I sent a rather frivolous letter to Pennywhistle deeding the firm my wages for the current week, and intimating my intention never again to put pen to paper in their service. Instead of drawing up a systematic plan for ekeing out my small

capital whilst unemployed, I drew the whole legacy in notes and gold and purchased a ticket on the G.W.R. to Penzance. It was a first-class ticket.

I cannot say why I especially chose Penzance. I think I wanted to see Land's End. I had not been out of London for ten years.

I never saw Land's End, and of my legacy I still have by far the larger part—in notes and gold—in the drawer of the table on which I write. The notes have served a useful purpose ; but I never spent them. Economy has had nothing to do with this ; I never had the chance to spend the money although I am now an old man—a very old man indeed.

Still, to my journey. I pass over the delight of one, who had not for years been further afield than Hampton Court, in the lush greenery of late Spring in Devon. From the red cliffs of Dawlish to the shipping of the Tamar everything appeared new and wonderful, and as the train swung westward over the serpentine curves of the Cornish track the spirit of adventure rose even higher. It rose until I began to feel that I could no longer brook the idea of travelling to the destination recorded on my ticket. Getting out at one's proper station was a pandering to conventionality abhorrent to the spirit of the true buccaneer ; and I soon saw that this thing was impossible. I must, in fact, get out somewhere else, even at the loss of my baggage.

The next stop settled the matter. Beyond a

white fenced station a banked road ran round the flank of a granite hill—gorse-grown above the timber in the hollow—to regions, for all I knew to the contrary, untrodden by the foot of man. There was also a motor car by the station with its bonnet set bravely along the mysterious road, and upon it the legend :

“POLTYACK.”

Whereat I jumped out of the train in the soft Spring air, hustled my baggage out of the van and boldly boarded the car.

And so, by tortuous and undulating Cornish roads, I came to Poltyack.

. . . . .

It is a quiet little village ; a disappointingly, monotonously, peaceful little village, in a deep and heathery coombe, which runs out into a tidal harbour. By climbing the sides of the coombe one finds oneself on high cliffs of crumbling “killas,” the ochre-yellow clay slate of the district. The landscape inland is rather monotonous, a series of small fields chequering a rolling country-side broken by small patches of timber, and a distant background of granite hills. With the unlovely addition of an occasional ruinous engine house over the shaft of some “knocked ” mine it is Devonshire on a pettier scale. The billows of the ground are less abrupt ; the banks which enclose the fields are lower and

less luxuriantly overgrown ; the colours of earth and vegetation less vivid ; and the hills less lofty than in the sister county.

The sea, however, drew me. Instinctively I turned to this last refuge of broken men with an inherited intuition. I had a vague idea that before many days my ship might literally come home in Poltyack harbour. In the meantime I mooned daily along the heathery wind-swept cliff-tops, keeping a sharp look-out for the unexpected, yet lazily indifferent as to when and whence it might advance upon me—so great was the faith of a failure.

And my ears yet ring with the murmur of insect life, the whooping gulls and the whispering waters below. I can yet see the low-flying shag cormorants put out to sea. I can smell the thyme across the chasm of all these years.

But it was not so—in the sunshine and the fair weather of my first few days at Poltyack—that my faith was fulfilled.

. . . . .

“ ’Tis bastely weather,” quoth the “ boots ” of the *Trevelyan Arms*. “ Weant goo out to-day, wilt a ? ”

Certainly a fine thick rain was shrouding the cliffs in a mystic haze, but this state of affairs—in my present mood—rather appealed to me than otherwise. I laughed in the teeth of the wondering “ boots ” and, mackintoshed and gaitered, strode out into the flurry. Some strange sixth

sense was throbbingly alert, and I knew within myself that the hour had struck.

I reached the top of the cliff to westward without incident and struck out in the direction of a cave I had marked for exploration. My cue was to act and behave as if this journey was entirely commonplace. I should persuade myself that I was merely going to look at a natural curiosity, returning to my little whitewashed *Trevelyan Arms* in time for lunch—as I had arranged. Having worked myself into this state of mind, superficially, I walked forward blithely on my mission.

I had not gone very far before I imagined that I could hear footsteps in my wake. I turned sharply, but not sharply enough to spot my pursuer—if, indeed, he existed outside my own fancies. I stood alone amidst the dripping heather in a sombre prison of grey mist. Laughing at my over-receptive mind I continued my walk; and again behind me I heard the following feet. I refused to look round twice, but ploughed on as if unconscious. If this was hallucination, I thought, the best plan was to ignore it; if I was indeed being followed it was better to throw the unknown off his guard by apparent ignorance of his presence.

So far well and good. But when I suddenly became aware that a third person walked before me I began to feel slightly nervous, and for a second or two I even thought of returning to the hotel. But, considering after all that people

are not customarily robbed and pitched over cliffs in twentieth-century England—even in a sea fog mixed with rain—I kept on.

I quickened my pace to overtake the man ahead and satisfy myself, at the least, as to *his* identity and intentions.

And so doing I stepped over the edge of an unexpected gully and, slipping and slithering over the damp and greasy killas, rolled on the short grass at the bottom at the feet of a girl.

She had been looking out over the cliff, but on hearing the rumble of the avalanche overhead she gave a jump, narrowly missed losing her balance, and finally fell backward into a gorse bush.

“Oh!” she said, laughing, “you nearly frightened me into the sea, and now I’m simply stuck full of prickles. What a nuisance! I hope you didn’t hurt yourself, but it’s really your own fault.”

I felt rather sheepish, but scrambled to my feet as quickly as I could and assisted her out of her uncomfortable seat. “I’m awfully sorry,” I began. “As you say, the fault—Marjorie!” I cried. “You!”

For a second or so we stared at one another, speechless with astonishment.

“Why, Jack,” she then said softly, “what a curious—why, Jack, it’s ages since I saw you. Are you living here? or——”

Again she paused in confusion. It was, in



truth, ages since I last set eyes on Marjorie Matthews—five age-long years, in fact. In that time I had fallen from a proud confidence that the world was my oyster—that I held it, so to speak, by the slack of the nether wear—to a saddened conviction that my limited strength could neither open the oyster nor swing this cumbrous world whose breeches I had so bravely grasped.

Wherefore, I hardly relished this meeting; and I think—I venture to think—that Marjorie herself was a little startled when she looked in my eyes and saw I had not forgotten. Anyway there was a quiver in her steady voice—although the eyes never wavered—as she said, “I suppose you never heard of my engagement to Captain Crawley, Jack?”

“I have not,” I assured her. This was spoiling things with a vengeance! Not at all the type of adventure which I had gone forth to seek! “I congratulate you,” I said, as soon as I could choke down the inconvenient lump in my throat. “I—er—wish you all happiness, Marjorie. Honestly!” I added, as an afterthought; whereat we both laughed again.

“He needed me, Jack,” said Marjorie, still with her fearless grey eyes fixed on mine—how well I remember the damp tendrils of hair on her forehead—“You—you were always so self-reliant, and, oh, Jack, I *knew* you would make a success. You have, haven’t you?”

“In a way I have,” I assured her. Somehow



or other it did not strike me as a lie. "Anyhow, I am on the verge——"

In my turn I came to an abrupt pause before committing myself to an absurd statement. My faith seemed to flake from me; my "adventure" was seemingly at an end; and beyond lay the end of all things. Almost I felt impelled to blurt out the bitter truth. "Crawley of all men! And he *needed* her! Heavens above, it was common knowledge that Crawley had needed every heiress that came across his path. And now this unmitigated swine——"

"Steady, my lad," I found myself mentally repeating. "This savours of jealousy." Crawley was a gentleman according to his dim lights.

"Oh, you mustn't worry about me, Marjorie," I said. "If I haven't set the Thames on fire, at least I'm a hardy old bird. It'll take a lot of hammering to beat me down, and——"

How long I should have continued this hideous travesty of devil-may-care bravado I do not know. Not for long, I am certain, for she obviously saw straight through the bluff, and her perception unsettled me more and more. She was just opening her lips to speak when the heather scrunched overhead and our conversation was broken by the arrival of a third person.

Not Crawley indeed—as the more imaginative may surmise. The new arrival was a gaunt creature in glistening oilskins and a sou'-wester. I thought at first he was a fisherman, but his voice quickly righted the mistake.

"An inclement day," he said blandly, peering down upon us like some black bird of prey. "An inclement day, indeed! Pardon my intrusion, but I saw you walking along the cliff ahead of me, and it occurred to me that our destination might be the same. I am looking for a place known as the Whistling Adit. I am a stranger here."

"So am I," I assured him, "though I have an idea it is not far off. Do you know where it is, Marjorie?"

"Of course," said Marjorie. "Just below here. Follow the path half way down to a sort of grassy ledge and turn to the left. Take care you don't slip. The cliff goes sheer into deep water below."

"There is a cave underneath, is there not?" asked the gaunt man. He had a singular, intense way of enunciating his sentences. "I understand that there is a cave?"

"Yes," said Marjorie, with a mischievous chuckle—I could imagine her mimicking his voice subsequently—"there is a cave underneath. Take care you don't fall into it. The cave and the adit are in connection." She steered the reproduction of his vocal spasms pretty close to the wind, and I became afraid he would notice the mockery. Apparently he did not.

"How fortunate!" he said. "I mean how fortunate I met you." He had joined us at the bottom of the gully by this time. "Perhaps—er—perhaps you would be so kind—go down

part of the way—say, as far as the turn off—with me. I am a stranger here and unused to these cliffs.”

“Cheek!” muttered Marjorie under her breath. “Very well,” she added, in a louder tone. “This way.”

## CHAPTER II

“**A** PERILOUS place! A very perilous place!” said the stranger uneasily, peering and craning his bird-like neck. We had halted a little more than half way down the cliff path at a place where, as Marjorie had told him, a grassy ledge—a sort of swollen protuberance—jutting to our left.

“Sorry,” said Marjorie coldly. “That’s the place. It’s no good peering like that. You’ve got to get round the knob before you can see the adit.”

“A slip,” said the stranger, “would precipitate one to instant death.”

“Oh, no! Not *instant* death. You’d fall in the water.”

“Bother the man,” she whispered to me. “How on earth *can* any human being funk an easy place like that? I think he’s a bit dotty.”

“He is,” I agreed, “but he appears harmless enough. Are you going on? I’d like to see the adit myself.”

“It’s a blow hole,” explained Marjorie, without answering my question—she frowned doubtfully at the stranger, who seemed afraid to advance—“There’s a cave underneath connecting with an old mining level, and at high tide in a sea the

spray comes spouting out from the adit's mouth. You can hear it murmuring if you listen."

"Very perilous," said the stranger.

I stepped on to the ledge, and I almost fancied I caught a twinkle in his eye as Marjorie followed me.

"Perilous—very perilous!" he muttered as he edged along behind us.

We came to a stop on a flat place in the face of the cliff. In front of us, hidden by the nature of the ground from the pathway, was the mouth of a low tunnel—evidently the entrance of an old mine, for one could trace the outcrop of the vein above. Below us tumbled the grey and oily swellings of the Atlantic, wrinkled with the rain, and in the entrance of the tunnel the wind sucked "back and forth" with a gentle whistling sound. Unconsciously a shiver ran through me as I glanced around. The wet slate of the cliff and the sodden looking ocean below! It was the last thing I looked upon as I turned to enter.

A match spluttered and the gaunt man lit a candle which he handed to Marjorie. "You will perhaps be so good as to lead the way," he said.

"Not much way to lead," came a muffled voice from inside. "Here's the connection, and you can't get any further." Following we found ourselves on the brink of a gloomy pit from the bottom of which came the gurgle and wash of the sea. By the light of our solitary candle I could make out that the tunnel continued again,

six or seven feet further in, but the low roof made a jump impossible. The stranger was a few yards behind me lighting another candle.

"If you feel in the crevice on your right, you will find a rope," he remarked. "The rope is attached to a plank, which you can pull over."

"What do you mean," I cried. "I thought this was your first visit!"

"That was a lie," he remarked complacently. "Kindly do as I say."

"I'll see you hanged!" I said—my suspicions thoroughly aroused—and I jumped for him.

The stranger flicked a hand from behind his back, and I fell back gasping. The unexpected sight of a revolver barrel aligned on one's stomach produces moral effects which must be experienced to be understood.

"If you do what I say you will come to no harm," he repeated dryly. "If you do not what I say I will—ah—shoot you both."

His eyes glittered savagely in the candlelight, and his tone carried conviction. Cursing myself for the mess I had dragged Marjorie into I groped for the rope.

I found it without difficulty, and still under cover of the merciless pistol I dragged the two-inch plank attached clattering across the gap. Placing the girl in front of me so as to protect her as far as possible I walked over to the far side.

"Now go right down the tunnel until you come to a wooden gate," ordered our captor. "If

I don't hear you kicking the woodwork, or if you stop kicking the woodwork until I tell you to stop, I shall open fire." I did as he bid me, and we heard him drag the plank back and send it splashing down the pit. Presently he joined us, and I was relieved from my humiliating task of pounding the heavily barred wooden contraption against which I had been brought up. At further command we passed through. That gate clashed and the click of a padlock announced that we were prisoners.

"Prettily done," he chuckled. "You must excuse my rather brusque methods; but I need your assistance in a little experiment, after which you will be free to go where you please—ahem!—anywhere you please. First, however, we must have some light." He clicked a button, and an electric globe, roughly fastened to a wooden plug, glowed on the roof of the tunnel. By its light I saw that where he stood the working opened out to a fair sized chamber, at one side of which was a wooden chest covered with a tarpaulin. A bend in the tunnel hid us from observation by anyone on the further side of the gap. The gate which imprisoned us was built of four inch timbers. It was pivoted like a turnstile in the centre and the spaces between the baulks were large enough for a man to thrust his arm through.

Our jailer threw off the tarpaulin and took some object that jingled gently from the wooden chest. "Shove your hands out between the



bars," he now ordered, covering at the same time not me—the cunning devil—but poor frightened Marjorie. I hastened to do as he said, felt a sudden chill, heard a sharp snap, and there I stood with my wrists handcuffed together—helpless as a tethered and hobbled ox.

The gaunt man laughed again and sucked his thumb. "Not so bad for a Hubble-Bubble," he said. To my horror I saw the light of lunacy gleam unmistakably in his dark eyes. With a desperate effort I pulled myself together and—held my tongue. I judged it best not to irritate him in any way.

"Not so bad for a Hubble-Bubble," he repeated, as he carefully lifted some sort of apparatus from the chest and arranged it on a glass plate in the centre of the chamber. "Young man, you are indeed fortunate, for to you is the glory—to you is the glory—whilst the poor Hubble-Bubble—the poor Hubble-Bubble—who cares for a mad Hubble-Bubble I ask you?"

His voice rose to a whine of self-pity as he bolted down a thing with a wheel in the centre of his plate. He attached a few wires to brass screws, and then began to twirl the wheel with great rapidity. Immediately the cell was illuminated by a succession of blue flashes.

"Poor Hubble-Bubble!" said tactful Marjorie, with a soothing little coo—half real, half assumed. "Poor Hubble-Bubble, let Marjorie out, Hubble-Bubble, *please*."

"I will," replied the Hubble-Bubble in a



perfectly rational tone, "only not this way. Don't be afraid, Marjorie. Walk over to the end of the tunnel."

I heard her pass in.

"What do you see?" inquired the madman, raising a fresh shower of sparks from his infernal machine.

"A curtain," said Marjorie's voice.

"Well, wait a minute." He drew a violin from the chest, handling it with great tenderness. Cuddling it under his chin he drew the bow across the strings, and to my astonishment the note was repeated from the heading of the tunnel where Marjorie stood. "Correct!" he grunted. "Now, my dear, don't be afraid. Lift the curtain and tell us what you see."

There was a second's pause. "Tin plates," quoth Marjorie. "How nice! Quite a cosy little room! Do you want me to go in?"

The Hubble-Bubble smiled paternally.

"Please!" he said, and I heard Marjorie move. There came a sharp puff of wind. "She's gone," he said simply, and an awful wave of horror swept over me.

"Marjorie!" I screamed, "Marjorie!" For a time I raved impotently at him, striving to break my handcuffs and ever and again pausing to shout her name down the echoing tunnel. During this exhibition the self-styled "Hubble-Bubble" sat unmoved and patiently smiling, until sheer exhaustion stifled my cries.

"Aren't you making rather a fuss?" he finally

inquired. "I haven't hurt the girl. If you'll behave you may go and see for yourself."

"You swine!" I broke out afresh. "You've killed her!"

"I have not," he answered curtly. He now appeared quite sane again, and it was somewhat borne in upon me that he might be speaking the truth.

"Where is she then?" I asked. Without vouchsafing an answer he rose and removed the handcuffs. I stumbled wildly down the passage and raised the curtain beyond which Marjorie had passed.

On the further side was a narrow chamber—the end of the working—lined by four large plates of zinc or galvanised iron. I entered this, fully expecting to find myself precipitated through some trapdoor in the floor, but too miserable to desire any other fate.

To my utter astonishment the expected trap not only failed to open, but the floor, on which I stamped two or three times, rang solid. Thoroughly convinced that the whole business must be a nightmare I crawled back to the gate.

"Satisfied?" inquired the Hubble-Bubble.

"I suppose I am," I answered, furtively pinching myself. "What do you propose to do now?"

"Send you to join her if you like." He must have caught some sudden eagerness in my eyes, for he laughed. "In the first place I shall now be able to release you," he said. "I only warn

you that any interference with either myself or my appliances condemns Miss—er—Marjorie to an unavoidable, if somewhat lingering, death. She is now a hostage for your good behaviour. Do you understand ? ”

I bowed my head and he unlocked the gate.

“Where have you put her ? ” I repeated. The Hubble-Bubble opened his lips to reply when a loud hail echoed from without. “Damn ! ” he remarked. “This complicates matters. Who on earth can that be ? ”

“Marjorie ! ” holloaed the unknown—the voice was tense with anxiety—“Marjorie, are you there ? ”

The Hubble-Bubble appeared perplexed. “What is your relationship to that young lady ? ” he asked. “I imagined you to be her *fiancé*.”

“Only a friend,” I answered briefly.

“Ah ! I apologise. This other person sounds like the lover then—eh ? Hullo, out there ! ”

“Hullo ! ” hailed the voice, with a new note of relief. “Is Marjorie there ? ”

“Yes,” said the Hubble-Bubble. “Come over.”

“How the dickens do you get across ? ” queried the voice. “There’s a seven foot gap and a clear drop below.”

“Get your fingers in the crevice on your right, and do a ‘bent arm.’ ” There was a scuffling sound, and a grating of nailed shoes. A man came cautiously feeling his way along the adit,

to pause, blinking, in the glow of the electric light. As I had rather anticipated, it was Angus Crawley.

“Jack Thorpe, begad!” he laughed. “Where on earth did you spring from, and what——Where’s Marjorie?” he broke off sharply, his eye suddenly taking in the saturnine “Hubble-Bubble,” the unholy-looking apparatus and the latticed gate.

“Where indeed?” smiled Mr. Hubble-Bubble. “I was just on the point of explaining the matter to this gentleman when you interrupted us.”

## CHAPTER III

A MAN of action was Crawley—fortune hunter or otherwise as he might be.

Without waiting for more explanations he seized the Hubble-Bubble by the wrist, and with a sharp wrench “hammer locked” his arm behind his back.

“Spit it out,” he ordered, “or I’ll tear your arm off. What have you done with Miss Matthews? Quickly!”

Drops of anguish were moistening the forehead of the lunatic, but never a word he answered. “No good, Crawley,” I said, sadly. “This chap has performed some swinish conjuring trick, and he won’t undo it unless we obey him.”

“Won’t he?” quoth Crawley. “I’ll soon persuade the beast. Bring her back now, you! Do you hear?”

“Don’t be silly,” said the tortured Hubble-Bubble. “How can I when you’re twisting my arm. It’s not a conjuring trick—it’s a scientific experiment.”

Crawley seemed to see his point, for he dropped his wrist. “What do you mean?” he demanded.

The Hubble-Bubble rubbed his injured limb. “I must take my time to explain,” he answered, “and I need a smoke after all this excitement.”

Squatting himself on the floor he popped his thumb into his mouth. "Bubble! Bubble!" he gurgled, "Hubble—Bubble—Bubble!" and Crawley shrank suddenly from him. I nodded. "Humour him," I whispered, "it's our only chance."

"You'll keep your promise, won't you, Hubble-Bubble?" I added, patting him on the shoulder. It appeared that Marjorie's tactics were the safest.

"I will," he said, and apparently finished his "smoke." "Sit down both of you and I will explain, as far as I can, where Miss Marjorie is."

I caught Crawley's eye again, and he nodded. With as much patience as we could muster we seated ourselves on the floor in front of him.

"How many dimensions of space are there?" he asked, locking his thin arms around his bony knees. "There are three—are there not?—length, breadth and depth, or thickness?"

"What the deuce——" began Crawley; but I silenced him with a frown. "Yes," I said, "there are three dimensions."

"How do you know?" snapped the Hubble-Bubble.

"Well——" I started to explain, "well ——"

I paused. After all, how on earth did I know. It was pretty obvious that there *were* three dimensions—how could one think of anything which *wouldn't* resolve itself into three dimensions but—hang it all, what was the use of arguing with a lunatic?

“Supposing, for the sake of argument,” continued the Hubble-Bubble, “that we were impossibly flat sort of people, existing in two dimensions only—no depth at all. Everything in our universe would have only length and breadth—eh?—and instead of a sphere—a body that is, so to speak, made up of an *infinite* number of circles, one on top of another—we could only imagine a circle. If anybody attempted to indicate the existence of a more perfect body than the circle we would say——”

“Impossible!” snorted Crawley, with soldierly stupidity.

“Humour him, man! For God’s sake humour him!” I groaned. “It’s our only chance.”

“Er—ah! Oh, yes! Very interestin’!” said Crawley.

“The Earth is a sphere; so are the Sun and the Moon and all the Heavenly Host,” continued the madman, in what I must admit was a very rational argument. “Because *human* intelligence fails to grasp the possibility of any more perfect bodies, does that mean to say no such thing exists. What we call our ‘Reason’ tells us that what we conceive the Universe to be is in itself infinite, yet we have as much conception of this infinity we gabble about as a jellyfish has of Higher Mathematics—it’s a thing clean out of our comprehension.

“I say anything is possible”—his voice began to rise in a lifting sing-song, and the glare of madness surged back in his beady eyes. “I



know now what I feared to know before—what I was not meant nor made to know—for certain waves ran up along the fourth dimension and made another thing we do not understand, which we call electricity—ran up from new infinite infinities—take it away and you drop—drop—drop——”

Suddenly he began to cry like a child. “Only a Hubble-Bubble after all,” he blubbered, “and I have seen the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof—only a Hubble-Bubble !”

I began to see what I may venture to call the lines along which he had gone mad. Marjorie—wherever she might really be—had in his conception slid off along some incomprehensible “dimension”—direction would be a better word—to a new universe. If we only gave him time to fool himself to the height of his desire, there was a chance he might become satisfied with his “experiment” and return her to us. But where was she ?

“I tuned my chamber,” whined the Hubble-Bubble, “and the current of the electricity slacked, and I fell through a million worlds.” There was something dreadfully compelling in the earnestness of his raving. “I have only been in two, but my mad brain knew it passed through, so that the passing of a million was less than the passing of one, and the second time I had nearly fallen in the sea. Those two are aching billions away, and myriad worlds apart from one another, and yet—and yet—not



the smallest fraction of an inch. Oh! God! God! God!"

Like the scream of a wounded horse his dreadful cry of agony vibrated along the rocky gallery. Even stolid Crawley was visibly trembling, and I was wrestling with an overwhelming desire to run for it. To get away from his ghastly company and the intolerable atmosphere of the tunnel. "Never mind," I managed to whisper, "never mind! That's all over now. Stick to facts we can understand."

It seemed I had struck the right chord. The Hubble-Bubble's face cleared immediately. "The facts of the case are that I can make my way from this adit into at least two worlds," he said. "Never mind how I did it. I have been and I have seen—along—along—the fourth dimension——"

"Tell me to stick to facts again," he said hurriedly in a low anxious tone.

"Stick to facts," I repeated.

"I will. In the second world—I picture it as being the more remote of the two—I had the misfortune to find myself hanging over the bosom of an apparently boundless ocean. You see I went with a rope attached to a pin—the pin being outside the influence of *that*"—he waved his hand toward the curtained chamber. "Funny sensation," he continued, "to find oneself dangling about a hundred feet above the open sea—other end of the rope not visible. I scrambled back whence I came, and as I climbed through the vanishing

point the new world disappeared. I slid down the rope again for a few feet, and it reappeared again. Then I climbed back, pulled up the rope and renewed my experiment on another note. Had better luck this time."

"Pshaw!" said Crawley.

"Are you going to accompany us to this place where Miss Matthews has gone?" I asked, as gravely as I could.

"Never! I shall never return. I have accomplished all that is necessary, and each time I have entered that world it has brought my madness down upon me worse than ever. I am quite mad, you know," he concluded, with passionless simplicity.

"I cannot tell you much more," he continued hurriedly, "much as I should like to. I have undertaken the task of peopling my new world with ordinary people who do not fly in the face of Providence. Why I am doing this I hardly know myself. When I die my secret dies with me; but who knows how long it will be lost? History invariably repeats itself, and perhaps one day others will be able to follow the path I have opened up. If such things come to pass the re-discoverers will find the descendants of my colonists—a living monument to my enterprise—eh?"

"A very clever plan!" I agreed—he was obviously hovering on the brink of a fresh outbreak. "A very clever plan! Now—not to waste further time—let us go to the new world at once, or Miss Marjorie will be feeling lonely."

"One moment," said the madman. "Only one goes—one man and one woman at each point. Also—remember this: So far as this world is concerned it is—Death!" said the Hubble-Bubble, and paused a moment to let the import sink in.

"There is no return," he continued, "and, sink or swim, you must battle out your own salvation amidst unusual hardships. I imagine you two fellows are both in the same boat with regard to this girl—a madman has more senses than five sometimes—therefore I let you choose between you. One goes—gets the girl—and loses everything else—career, home, friends, money, everything; the other—the other is—er—liberated."

Crawley jumped as if stung. This man certainly had a queer hypnotic power of convincing his audience. We both felt as if he must be telling the bald truth.

"Look here," blurted Crawley suddenly. "What's your price? I'm not a rich man, but Miss Matthews herself will pay anything within reason on my promise. I'm sick of this nonsense! You're no more mad than I am. Name your price."

The Hubble-Bubble had started up his machine. "Price?" he smiled. "My dear sir—I am a millionaire. One of you will know why before long. Furthermore, I cannot bring the girl back. Hurry up and settle who goes."

A horrible suspicion seized me, and I dragged

Crawley aside. I had just remembered that inexplicable rush of air from the dead-end of the adit when Marjorie disappeared. "Crawley," I whispered. "I think I know what he means. The man really *has* hit on some infernal electrical contrivance, and the man who enters that chamber——" I had to stop and control myself.

"The man who goes in there," I continued, "dies as—God forgive me, for I led her into it—Marjorie has died."

Crawley turned ashen. "You don't seriously——" he muttered. "The body——?"

"Destroyed in some way—there was—there was a sort of—oh, damn it, Crawley!" I cried, and came to a full stop. My tongue could not utter the thought that was in me.

The soldier rocked a little on his feet, and I thought he would fall. Presently he pulled himself together. "My God!" he stuttered, "How—My God, Thorpe, what a ghastly business! It can't be!"

"It is, if you like to put it that way," said the lunatic—he had sharper ears than we bargained for. "I advise you, however, not to wreak your vengeance on me until one of you has tried the truth of my statements. Dead or alive, I can assure you of one thing—Marjorie is alone and unprotected."

His last words maddened me. "Hold on," I cried—Crawley's hand was raised to strike. "Hold on until the experiment is finished. I'm going."

"It's sacrificing two lives instead of one," objected Crawley. "By God! I'm going to kill this devil—*now*."

"You're not," I said—I hardly know what prompted me to take this attitude—"I promised this man, and I'm going to keep that promise. I'm—ah!—Look out for him!"

I had forgotten the man's pistol. As I spoke he had us both covered; and back he forced us behind the barrier, which he again slammed to and padlocked. Impotently we watched him go through the performance with the wheel and the violin a second time.

"Now," he remarked briskly, as note answered note. "No more palaver! Who's for the trip?"

I looked at Crawley. "I *want* to go," I said. He caught my meaning and impulsively held out his hand.

"Thorpe," he said huskily, "if I'd known it was as bad as that I'd not—Thorpe, I'm sorry. Liked her well enough, poor little thing, but, swine that I am, it *was* the money. Thorpe, I *needed* it—devilish bad."

The echo of Marjorie's own self-confident expression under such sardonic circumstances!

"Will you forgive me?"

"Of course," I said, and our hands clasped.

"Time's up," snapped the Hubble-Bubble through the bars. "Who's the man?"

"I am," I said.

"Good!" replied the Hubble-Bubble, and shot Crawley through the heart. "Liberated!"

he jerked, "dead men tell no tales. Hurry up now!"

With mind and senses shocked into horror-struck acquiescence, with the feeling of absolute nightmare hard upon me, I crept into the chamber.

## CHAPTER IV

**I**F Crawley died I at least suffered the bitterness of death, which was spared him. There was something indescribably dreadful—even as I fled to take refuge in death from the horror of the maniac—in the mystery of the fate which awaited me. “Marjorie!” I shouted, or rather shrieked—the cry was instinctive—and plunged into the metallic chamber.

Dimly I realised that nothing had happened—nothing at all. For the first few moments I thought that this, perhaps, was death. Then it occurred to me that I was still waiting the touching of some button whose contact would blast my quivering body to less than dust. I thought the seemingly prolonged wait was the mental effect of suspense. “Strike!” I called desperately.

Still I lived. The only answer was a stirring of air round my temples, and a growing sensation in my right hand as if it had been struck with a club. I found that my eyes were shut.

I opened them slowly and, even as the lids parted, realised with a well remembered shock that I was in broad daylight. It was for all the world like what I had half expected—the



awakening on a bright summer morning out of an ugly dream.

But if dream it was, it was a queer place I had chosen to go to sleep in. I was on my hands and knees on a grassy bank. My right hand was buried about three inches underground, and the turf had burst and scattered around it as if from a miniature explosion. Pulling it out, without much difficulty, I rose to my feet.

I looked round once, and burst into a fit of semi-hysterical laughter. It was not until I recollected the scene from which I had just this moment been snatched that I was able to control myself.

I was, as I have already mentioned, on the flank of a grassy mound, which I now found fringed the base of a limestone bluff behind me—a cliff, perhaps, a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet in height. At my feet was a stretch of meadowland, sloping gently to a charming little lake, and beyond that again the forest. Far in the distance a range of hills melted into a hazy blue skyline, and faint from the forest rang the lingering cry of some unknown beast, seeking its food from God. The calm beauty of it after the terrible scene in the tunnel!

Then my heart gave a violent jump. About a couple of hundred yards away knelt a forlorn little object in a brown waterproof, yet moist with Cornish rain although the sky was flawless. Her face was sunk in her hands and she seemed to be praying. Immediately—so selfish are we—I



clean forgot how moments before I had seen Angus Crawley smitten before my eyes.

I approached quietly so as not to disturb her, and again my heart began to run out of control. She said "Jack!" This statement of Marjorie's cleared a myriad difficulties from my path.

"Jack," she moaned, her face still covered by her hands, "please God, send me Jack. I'm frightened."

What could a man do? Before she knew what had happened she was in my arms and I was kissing her—more than once, my children, more than once. How can I forget the wonder in her eyes and my own great joy to have fought to her side through what seemed the very jaws of death?

Suddenly her face went crimson and she thrust herself free from me. "Oh, Jack!" she gasped, and her lip trembled pitifully. "What are we doing? Have you forgotten?"

"Forgotten what, Marjorie? I've forgotten everything except you."

Her eyes fell. "Take me home, please," she said steadily. "You know what I mean."

"Home?" I felt inclined to laugh, but for the pity of it. The words of the madman were yet ringing in my brain, and already I knew instinctively—or thought I knew—that never again would mortal man pass by the road we had travelled. Had Angus Crawley walked free as air in the world we had left instead of lying

stark in the gloomy adit, he could not have been more effectively swept from my path—poor fellow! And she asked to be taken to home and him!

I caught her hands, and I told her the story from the moment of her own disappearance and the arrival of Crawley to the final scene. I omitted Crawley's death—which I meant to hide from her, if possible, and I also sought to spare her the humiliation of his final confession. I gave a good deal of time to explaining the meaning of Hubble-Bubble's argument.

I am sorry to say, however, that the feminine note here became ludicrously strong. I might just as well have wasted my breath on a brick wall.

"I don't understand," she said, shaking her pretty head. "We came out of the tunnel on to that bank. Why can't we get back the way we came?"

As if to answer her question by practical demonstration—where argument had failed—a slight thud sounded in our rear. Looking over my shoulder I beheld a bulky parcel, with a coil of rope atop, sitting on the identical spot where I had first opened my wondering eyes to this alien sunshine. Thinking that the Hubble-Bubble might have relented, I grabbed Marjorie's wrist and hurried back to the bundle.

It lay, as I have said, on the spot where I had landed, the rope loosely coiled on top of it. As we approached, coil after coil of the latter

shifted, unrolled and—vanished. It was as if some invisible person pulled it up into an invisible hawse hole, situated about two feet above the ground. I did not stop, however, to marvel at the miracle. Getting one arm firmly round the waist of Marjorie, I gripped the rope with my free hand and hung on.

Hand and arm immediately disappeared from view up to the elbow, and as the Hubble-Bubble pulled in the rope I could even feel the end of the curtain in the tunnel sweep across my wrist. Then, whilst I stood in one universe with my hand on the threshold of another, the rope suddenly slackened. Some one trod sharply on my fingers; and there I stood at the foot of the cliff, with the cut end of the rope in my hand, blankly staring at a slip of paper.

On the paper was written one word : “ Sold ! ”

Whereat I perceived that our lunatic friend was a bit of a wag in his grim way, and I turned to comfort Marjorie.

I think she was beginning to understand the futility of any effort to get back without the assistance of some material link, such as the rope. She made one or two little dabs in the air, as if she thought to find the entrance that way, and then, to my great wonder, began to giggle.

“ It’s rather fun in a way, isn’t it, Jack ? But what *will* they say at home ? ” What, indeed ? “ Where on earth are we ? ”

“ Strictly speaking, nowhere,” I answered

drily. "I've tried to make you understand once, but you don't seem able to do so. If I tell you again, giving you my word I'm speaking the truth, will you believe me?"

"Course I will!" chirped Marjorie; and I sketched the situation to her pretty clearly. In fact, I managed to convince her this time, for Marjorie commenced to cry. It was very distressing.

"But—but I can't believe it! What—what will Angus do?"

"Do without you," I said brutally. "Look here, Marjorie, we might as well look things in the face, and it is just as well you should start without any illusions. When we thought you were probably dead and the Hubble-Bubble man said one of us might follow you—Crawley gave me precedence."

"Why?" asked Marjorie.

"Because I wanted to be with you, and Crawley wanted to be with your bank-book—which you left behind. Now do you see?"

"'Tisn't true," said Marjorie.

"He admitted it and, hang it all! which of us is actually here? Crawley did *not* care for you as much as you imagined, and I—well I, Marjorie—I love you with all my heart and with every fibre of my being. I never did love anybody but you, and I never will love anybody but you; so now you know it. And so, as far as I can see, I remain yours to do as you please with for life."

“Jack!” exclaimed Marjorie, and turned so deadly pale that I imagined she was going to faint. She remained with her eyes fixed on the ground for a long five minutes, and then :

“Poor Angus,” she murmured. “Silly me !”

I ventured to touch her hand, but she shook me away. “Not now,” she said gently ; “but I think I understand. Let’s see what is in the parcel.”

This sensible suggestion broke the tension. I unwrapped the canvas and spread the contents before her.

“Item,” I said, “one ham, one square tin of water biscuits, one tin pot, large, one tin pot, small, one axe and a letter—nothing else.”

“Which reminds me I’m hungry,” remarked Marjorie. She glanced at the watch on her wrist. “Good gracious !” she exclaimed, “it’s nearly two o’clock. Shall we have lunch first, or read the letter ?”

“You start in,” I advised her, “and I’ll read it meanwhile. And whilst Marjorie, her face puckered with amazement, solemnly sliced the ham with my pocket knife, I read the following :

“To the Cornish Emigrants.

“You two people now find yourselves in my new world which it is my task to make inhabited. Moreover, you can take my word for it that you will not be permitted to return. Kindly forget your former existence. I say this for your own benefit.

“With you I send a few supplies to give you a fair start—matches purposely excluded. You will get no more.

“There are already, or will be soon, other emigrants, but none will be planted nearer than, say, two thousand miles. If one of you dies the hope of being found by other emigrants may serve to keep the survivor sane.

“There is iron in the neighbourhood—if you can use it.

“Farewell. Not for untold centuries—perhaps never—shall the gates again open.”

“What a pig!” said Marjorie. “Does he really mean that I’ve got to live here with you for ever?”

“I’m afraid so.”

Marjorie smiled inscrutably. “Go and get some water,” she said. “Hurry, or the ham will all be eaten before you get back.”

. . . . .

The remainder of that afternoon we spent in exploring the immediate neighbourhood. We climbed to the top of the limestone cliffs by a little ravine, and found the country to the south was open downs, with a distant glimpse of the sea to westward. To eastward we saw high mountains which appeared to sweep round behind the forest to the north, penning us in with a semi-circle of hills. To the west a little river meandered, flowing down between the curious cliff formation and

the forest, from our lake to the sea. The lake itself appeared to be fed by two brooks, one of which ran in at its eastern extremity, whilst the other discharged about a mile lower down, near the head of the river. This second brook ran out of the forest across another meadow to the west.

"I like this country," said Marjorie, "but where on earth are we going to find a place to live in?"

I shook my head. "Cave?" I suggested.

"Too damp," said Marjorie. "You'll have to build me a house. Come along, and I'll show you the place."

As the sun was creeping closer to the western horizon, we hastened down the ravine again and turned eastward along the cliff to the place where we had originally landed. Half way up the cliff, near this point, was a broad shelf—a sort of gigantic, semi-circular step of at least fifty yards width. Above it the rock again towered nearly vertically for another sixty or seventy feet. Unless the carnivora of this wild appearing land could stand a ten fathom fall unscathed, or leap an equal distance in the air, the flat was quite inaccessible from above or below.

Except in one point. To the immediate eastward another ravine seamed the face of the cliff and this ravine was scalable. Half-way up a narrow ledge connected it with our proposed camping ground.

In the centre of the flat, to which we immedi-



ately climbed, was a thick hawthorn with the branches sweeping fanwise away from the cliff. Marjorie grunted happily, and shoved the axe into my hand. I saw what she intended, and with a few slashes cleared enough of the branches to leave room for the canvas. Under this rough canopy we established our first independent home. Fortunately the possession of three matches saved me from the immediate need of making fire by friction—a feat which is only accomplished with the greatest difficulty except by cannibals and Boy Scouts.

“I believe what’s really happened is that we’re on a desert island,” said Marjorie, an hour or two later. “If that’s not Venus I’ll eat my hat, and, look, Jack! there’s the Great Bear and the North Star. How silly of you to talk about being in another universe!”

“Very well, Marjorie; only if you’d a little *more* knowledge of these things you might observe two further facts. From the height of the Pole Star I should say we were in about the same latitude as Cornwall, and from the coincidence of sunset with my watch’s idea of the correct time for it I should say we were in about the same longitude. How do you account for that?”

“Oh, bother you!” grunted Marjorie. “You’re too deep for me.”

Presently she curled up by the fireside and, despite the hardness of a turf bed to one unaccustomed, dropped quietly off to sleep. I gently inserted my rolled up jacket under the curly



head and sat down to keep guard on the other side of the fire.

This excellent act of devotion, however, was frustrated by my promptly tumbling off to sleep myself. The excitement of the day had been too much for me.

## CHAPTER V

A BIRD twittered outside the window, and I shifted myself lazily. How hard the mattress seemed to be! I must speak to my landlady——

No! I had forgotten. I was in the *Trevelyan Arms* at Poltyack.

“Damn it!” I grunted, “where *has* that blanket slipped to—I’m half frozen.” I groped and fumbled, and finally—as a last resource—I half opened my eyes.

Across the long flats of air the climbing sun had shot a far-reaching arm, and set the red print of his fingers on the mountains to the north. My face was wet with the dew which frosted the damp turf an inch or two from my nose, and on the edge of the ledge a naked bush loomed darkly above the billowing mist in the valley. And to clinch the growing conviction that I was not in bed in the *Trevelyan Arms* I heard Marjorie snore, just one low-pitched, musical snore, and a little grunt at the end of it, to remind me that I was facing a brand new world, with practically no tools and with one beloved encumbrance dependent upon me for her existence.

I rolled quietly over and eyed the brown

bundle severely across the charred embers. Dirty-faced Marjorie, with her hair horribly untidied and a splash of white ash on her impertinent nose! It was a strange life she was entering, so I let her sleep on.

Shivering in the chill of early morning, I took the two pots and scrambled down the ravine to the meadow. It occurred to me that the time was ripe to hunt for some more permanent food supply than the ham and the water biscuits. I didn't quite see how I was to set about it, but, hoping for the best, I went on down to the lake for water.

Unfortunately I lost my way in the fog, and had to sit on a rock for an hour until it lifted. Whilst I was waiting I heard a scurry and a rustle in the grass, and saw a pair of beady eyes glancing up at me between the long stalks.

I sat perfectly immobile, and the little animal—it was rather like a guinea pig in appearance, but as big as a hare—edged closer. Its nose twitched with fatal curiosity, and with a shrill little squeak—seeing that I did not move and was unlike any known animal, dangerous or otherwise—it finally stretched its neck and nibbled tentatively at the toe of my boot.

With the lightning swiftness of a viper's stroke my other foot lashed home. Man had begun his destructive career in Arcadia, and the guinea pig rolled quivering across the sward. I promptly cut its throat with my pocket knife, washed my

hands in the lake, and returned to camp rejoicing in the good omen.

Marjorie was still sleeping, but the noise I made lighting the fire must have disturbed her. "Mornin'!" mumbled a sleepy voice from beneath the waterproof. "Give Marjorie her tea, Mrs. Macfarlane."

I scratched my head. It was a shame to disillusion her, but I felt the task of impersonating Marjorie's poor old nurse a bit beyond me. Moreover there was no tea to give.

"Tea! tea! tea!" repeated Marjorie sullenly, and thrust a square little hand from under the covers. "What time is it, and why——?"

"Oh!" she said and rolled over, blinking stupefied grey eyes at the canvas canopy. "Where on——?"

"Earth am I," I finished for her. "Poor old girl! Look what I've got."

She regarded my catch sourly, and wiped the ash on her nose over the rest of her face. "It's a guinea pig," she said. "Why did you kill it?"

"For food of course."

"What—that? Then you can eat it yourself. Guinea pigs aren't wholesome."

"Indeed!" I remarked. "Then what do you propose to have for breakfast?"

"Bacon'n eggs," grumbled Marjorie. "Who am I that I should eat guinea pig at my time of life? I want to go home."

"So do I," I said. "At least," I added,

"if you do. I seem to have acquired the habit of following you."

She propped her elbows on her knees, and grinned wickedly. "Is it really true that we can never get back?" she asked.

"Absolutely. We've got to live out our own lives henceforward by ourselves."

"Then I'm not sorry. I'm an orphan, and so are you, so no one'll miss us much."

"Besides," she added, "seeing that there's nobody else to say nasty things about Marjorie Matthews, I don't mind telling you it's rather fun having such a devout lover. I wonder how far I can bully you without getting retaliated on?"

"You're very frank," I said.

"I mean to be. Have you got an *angelic* temper—*Jack*?"

"The answer," I replied coldly, "is in the negative."

"Cook your old guinea pig," ordered my new ruler. "I'm going down to the lake to wash. I'm simply caked with grime. By the way, you needn't have fagged that water. There's a spring over there in the corner place. That's another reason why I'm going to be boss. I'm more intelligent than you."

She went whistling down the meadow, and returned, marvellously tidied up, with her hair in a pigtail. She said she had seen a beast like a fallow deer across the lake on the north beach; that it had stamped its foot at her; and that I

must make some fish hooks out of her hairpins at once. "It's a far cry to the golf links," said Marjorie, "so we had better go fishing instead. That reminds me I'm booked to play with Angus this morning."

Her face fell. "You're sure—quite sure, Jack—he didn't——"

"He admitted it," I said. I felt I was playing it low down on Crawley's memory, but surely the end justified the means. Why let her cherish an illusion that could only mar her happiness?

"Then he'll not miss me. Do you know, Jack——Good heavens!" she laughed, "and I thought I was going to reform that man! Why didn't you come first and insist on my marrying you?"

I emptied my pockets and spread Aunt Wilhelmina's legacy before her. "My capital," I explained, "and my job," I added, as I topped the pile with Messrs. Grindle and Pennywhistle's letter.

"Well, you *are* an ass!" cried Marjorie. "Look what you were condemning me to. I'd much sooner have had you in any case, even if you were the most useless lump in the world, but you disappeared and never even wrote to me. Isn't the atmosphere of Queen Marjorieland conducive to plain speaking?"

"It is," I agreed. "I'll give you my share of the lake for a kiss."

I blushed, she blushed. It may have been momentary forgetfulness of present conditions,

but she blushed crimson. "Only one," she said, "and it's my lake anyway."

Another thing I learned that morning was that it is best to hang meat for a while. The guinea pig was as tough as teak.

## CHAPTER VI

I LEFT Marjorie, after breakfast, to scrape the hide of my first victim in the hunting field—the first in my life—and taking the axe and rope I made my way round the upper end of the lake to the forest. I was fortunate in finding a clump of firs, from which I hewed as many four inch spars as I could drag. I also procured a few bundles of willow twigs from the trees which grew along the brook. These tasks occupied me until about four o'clock in the afternoon, at which hour I returned to camp to find Marjorie enthroned in pompous self-esteem over three large fish which she had caught.

They must have been very confiding fish. They had taken worms off a bent hairpin, sharpened on a stone, and the tackle had consisted of a piece of string and a few of Marjorie's hairs plaited together. She said she had another bite, only the last comer straightened the hook and got away. I said she might as well continue the practice and leave me to labour at my house building.

I think a habit of picking up odd scraps of apparently useless knowledge, which had been my destruction in my previous existence, now



proved my salvation. I found I knew enough to build a fairly substantial hut, with four corner posts driven down to bed rock, tie beams and criss-cross braces which I lashed temporarily with creepers, later substituting raw-hide thongs. I bitterly felt the want of a gimlet, but made shift with the red-hot pricker of my clasp knife where holes were essential, substituting wooden plugs for nails. The walls were wattle daubed with clay, and the roof was to be thatched as soon as the grass grew long enough for the purpose. In the meantime I covered a part of it with the canvas, and was perplexed to find material for the rest of the space until what Caesar called *opportunissima res*—that is to say “a most fortunate event,” “for the narrator” understood—happened. A red deer came down into the meadow one morning with the tattered “velvet” already hanging from its antlers although it was only June, and made great clamour. I may mention that this is most unusual, for they prefer the mountains; but anyway there he was. I went down to shoo him away, when much to my astonishment he preferred to shoo me back up the ravine. Then I took the axe, descended again, and providentially slew him—I had no idea of the risk I ran. His hide covered the gap in our roof.

We worked from sunrise to sunset whilst the fine weather lasted, only hunting and fishing when food ran short—and after the death of the stag not at all. We had no vegetable food at

this period, for the nuts and berries in the forest were as yet unripe.

The fifteenth day dawned grey and watery, and before breakfast was over our newly completed building was put to the test. A good steady driving rain set in and lasted until nightfall, but the roof never leaked a drop, although the walls were dampish in places. We sat in state in our new residence and manufactured spear heads of sharpened bone—blessing the red deer's bounty as we worked.

"My hat!" exclaimed Marjorie, scraping away vigorously with a chip of flint—we refused to risk our precious knives on the job—"I've never worked so hard in all my life as the last two weeks, have you?"

"We've got a home anyhow, Marjorie," I said. "By the way, I think it's my duty to marry you now we have it completed—have you any objections?"

Marjorie dropped her work and looked at her hands, which bore sad traces of the fortnight's toil. "Jack," she said earnestly, "I've just thought of a frightful thing. It's funny it never occurred to us before."

I waited patiently for the rest. She seemed unusually upset.

"Jack, we can't get married. There's nobody to marry us!"

I yelled with laughter, and Marjorie seemed inclined to cry. "It may be very funny for *you*——" she began.

"What do you consider constitutes a marriage," I began.

"Do talk sense. It's too horribly serious to make jokes about."

"I am talking sense," I said. "If I married you in France, according to French law, would that be binding?"

"Oh! I see what you mean. We're in our own country and can make the laws to please ourselves. But—but, Jack, it doesn't seem right somehow."

When Marjorie takes this attitude it is no good arguing with her. I picked up my bone and continued my scraping.

"Jack"—after a long pause—"are you *sure* we can never get back to England?"

I scorned to answer the oft repeated question. There was another pause.

"Oh, well! In that case—— Well, nobody can say anything, can they? Why bother about it?"

"When it comes down to fundamentals," I remarked, "you have no proper morality at all—only a dread of convention."

"I'm not!" cried Marjorie. "I don't know what you mean, but I just hate conventions. Few people have had such a chance to be disrespectful. Hurroosh!"

But for once I was firm. I pulled out my fountain pen, tapped it, and found a little ink still remaining.

"This is to certify," I wrote—on the back of

a five-pound note—"that on June 13, 19— (the year one of the Emigration) was celebrated the marriage of Marjorie Matthews, Queen of Queen Marjorieland, owner of the lake, and suzerain of the adjoining forest—which she is afraid to enter—with her subject—the only existing one at the time of writing—John Thorpe.

"Issued from Limestone Hollow, By the Lake, June 13, 19— (Old Style) or the year one of the Emigration."

"Sign it," I said, "or oot o' ma hoose ye gang."

"Marjorie R." wrote Marjorie, with a flourish, and underneath I added the words which established our first official post: "John Thorpe—Recorder."

I have to add—making no comment, for Marjorie's mind is beyond me—that it was she who was first to insist on a Marriage Service. Nor was it a flippant one—as I fear the civil ceremony was.

"Merciful heavens," said Marjorie, as soon as we had completed that part of the business, and the knot was as firm as I could tie it at the moment, "what a flirt! Two weeks ago I was going to marry Angus Crawley. What would he say if he knew?"

I must have changed colour at the reminder, for she seized my arm in sudden alarm. "What is it, Jack?" she cried, with painfully precise intuition. "That horrible Hubble-Bubble didn't hurt Angus, did he?"

I tried feebly to fob her off with generalities, but she would not be denied. Reluctantly—for somehow I could not bear to tell a downright lie on our wedding-day—I told her the true tale of poor Crawley and the price he had paid. When I had finished she was crying more bitterly than I have ever seen a woman cry before or since.

“Oh, I led him into it!” she moaned. “I led him into it! And his mother!—— Jack! Why *couldn't* you have told me!”

I slipped my arm round her and drew her head down on my shoulder. “You’re a very nice girl,” I said, “but *such* a goose. Crawley came to find you, quite naturally, as any other man worth his salt would. If anybody is to blame it’s me, for I urged you to visit the adit. If Crawley had been in love with you he’d have been here now, for I certainly should have given him precedence——”

“Don’t go on,” ordered Marjorie sharply. “You’re making me think wicked things. I’m not really glad he’s dead—poor Angus—but—Oh, Jack, I’m glad you’re ass enough to have wanted to die with me.”

“We’ll not speak about it any more,” I said presently. “I’m afraid I’ve rather spoiled your wedding day, but never mind. We can make a new law obliging people to get married over and over again, whenever one of them feels like it. Besides, I’ve only got you to love, so I’m bound to do a frightful lot in one direction. You’ll

get what was intended for the whole community."

She sighed contentedly. "Until death us do part," she said. "But I hope, for my part, that the love will continue beyond the period of the marriage contract."

## CHAPTER VII

NOT to weary the reader with a prolix recital of early difficulties, and a honeymoon of hard work, I venture to skip a couple of months to the middle of August.

“An axe, a rope, two pocket knives, a pair of scissors—Marjorie’s—and two pots; a few yards of canvas and two mackintoshes,” ruminated a bronzed and bearded savage in guinea-pigskin garments, as he dangled his hairy limbs over the brink of his cliff dwelling. “Speaking with all due deference, I don’t think anybody can say we have buried our talents.”

Down below, in the calm summer afternoon, a furry animal with round white legs and a pig-tail waded to and fro in the lake, cautiously brandishing a fish spear. It wore water lilies in its hair; and as I watched it perceptibly wiped its nose with the back of its hand.

“Marjorie!” I hailed, in a quivering falsetto that sliced the quiet air like a razor blade.

Marjorie looked up and gave tongue in an indescribable yelp peculiar to herself. I saw her pick up her string of fish and start to trot toward me up the meadow. Half way to the cliff she dropped the fish and bounded like a stag at right angles to her former path. For a few moments she raced, doubling and twisting and crouching,



through the long grass, and then, with a triumphant yell, stood erect. By the scruff of the neck she held up a squeaking, kicking guinea-pig.

"Number four!" she shrilled. "Tell Hildebrand!"

Hildebrand was the elder of our first flock. He lived with two of his guinea-pig brethren in a little rock-walled enclosure against the cliff wall of Limestone Hollow. There were other signs of progress to be observed.

The house had been enlarged by the simple expedient of carrying the angles of the original hip roof to within a foot of the ground on all sides, and thatching over. This gave us an outer chamber, outside the original wattled walls, very convenient for storing supplies. It also meant a greater degree of warmth in the winter. The entrance was at the back, and one had to walk or crawl half round the storehouse to get to the central living room.

Where the friendly hawthorn had once stood was a thatched shed. Here clay pots, of crude workmanship, simmered on wood fires. Our first charcoal heap smoked dimly on the outskirts of the forest, and lumps of red hematite piled in a corner advertised the fact that I had discovered the Hubble-Bubble's iron mine down the river.

Marjorie came along the ledge whistling. "When did you get back?" she asked, and hove the new guinea-pig on top of Hildebrand. "I was too busy to notice you."



"Only this minute. I was watching you and trying to think what you looked like."

"Prehistoric Peep," said my wife complacently. "Give me my salt or I'll stick a fish spear in your leg."

"I've only a pound or so," I said sadly. "I believe those beastly deer come down and lick it out of the rock pans, but the big dish in the cave had dried out nicely. I got some crabs."

Marjorie inspected the salt and grumbled. "I believe you eat it," she said. "Open your mouth."

"I won't!" I cried, and sat down resolutely on the turf. "How dare you accuse me of such a thing. For two pins I'd——"

Before I could get any further the Prehistoric Peep had sunk her fingers in my back hair. "What'll you do?" she cried, and bore me kicking to the ground.

"I'll club you," I shouted defiantly. "Let me up! Oh, murder! Marjorie, you little beast——"

Suddenly I fell silent and my eyes began to bulge. From where I lay I got a clear view up the towering grey wall behind me, a clean sweep of sixty feet of smooth limestone ending sharply in a ragged fringe of turf and the pale turquoise of the sky. What drew my attention more particularly, however, was not so much the view as the latest addition.

A round black head with little sharp ears was silhouetted boldly against the blue and, even as

I watched, a large black paw crept cautiously over the edge.

"Mercy!" squealed Marjorie, who by this time had observed my sudden absorption and had followed my petrified gaze. "Whatever would you call that? I don't think I like it, Jack! Get your bow and shoot it!"

"You know very well I can't hit the house at ten yards," I retorted. "What's the use? I'm rather afraid it's a bear. That'll be the chap who scratches around among the berries, and I fear he has designs on Hildebrand."

"My darling!" cried Marjorie, and snatched the croaking Hildebrand to her furry bosom. "Who would eat muvver's roots and vegetables to see if they were poisonous if a nasty bear ate *him*?"

This was one of the sad duties of Hildebrand, who inherited the post on the untimely death of Winkles.

"What a horror!" continued Marjorie. "Do shoot him, Jack."

I plugged off a couple of arrows. "It's this green unseasoned wood," I explained as the bear withdrew—he evidently saw the futility of a jump. "You can't shoot straight with an unseasoned bow!"

"Were you shooting at the bear or the lake?" asked Marjorie coldly. "If it was the lake you aren't doing so badly."

I pocketed the insult and, armed with my bow and the heaviest spear, I climbed cautiously to

the head of the ravine. I was in time to see the intruder moving slowly eastward along the cliffs, to vanish in a clump of bushes. I fingered my bowstring meditatively—a bear would be a rich haul.

I looked down below and saw Marjorie with the kicking Hildebrand under her arm and a wooden spoon in her hand. She was forcing some unholy potion down his reluctant throat.

“One stroke of the iron claws of a bear”—so I had read in books—“will tear the scalp completely from a man’s head. The bear, although a peaceable animal when unmolested, is known to resist with ferocious energy any attempt upon his physical well-being.”

Marjorie stopped feeding Hildebrand and glanced up at me. I saw the flash of her white teeth. Poor little, lonely Marjorie! I was all she had in the world.

“Did you kill it?” she asked, as I returned.

I explained that the bear had gone away into some bushes.

“Rotter!” said Marjorie. “Now we shall probably all be eaten in our sleep. I’m sure it’s going to come back again.”

“Not at all!” I assured her. “It’s miles away by now. Ran like mad the minute it saw me.”

“But that was only to get all the other bears,” whined Marjorie. “It probably went into the bushes to laugh, the horrid brute!”

She cast her eye upwards again and promptly delivered the robust yell of a healthy, nine-stone maiden in distress.

"I told you so! I told you so!" she skirled. "Here's *dozens* of bears and Hildebrand's *terrified*. Drive them away at once!"

"I deny the dozens," I said, "but there are certainly three." The round black object had reappeared upon the rim, and flanking it to right and left were two similar phenomena on a smaller scale. I called them evil names, whereat they withdrew and promptly poked their quivering noses over in a new quarter.

"Anyway," I said, "they can't possibly get at us. I expect they only smell the honey." We had at this time a big, and immensely sticky, earthenware pot of wild honey, which I had garnered at the price of many a bitter sting to tickle the palate of Marjorie. "I shall peg down the tree-trunk to-night, however," I concluded.

"You'd better," agreed Marjorie. "And I think you might as well sit up in case of accidents. There's a pot of new herb tea I've discovered, and it smells positively *delicious*, and Hildebrand loves it—don't you, darling? He's just had some, so if all goes well *you* can drink a little while you're watching."

"Have you drunk any yourself?" I asked sternly.

"Not yet, but I want to, awfully. That's another reason why I want you to sample it."

Later, as I sat by my little camp fire under the

stars, arms slid gently round my neck. "You *will* be good about the tea, won't you, Jack?" cooed the voice of Marjorie in my ear; and the strong towers of my resolution shook.

"It's nice," she said. I felt the touch of warm lips on my cheek, and the cold rim of a clay dish at my mouth. I could not make up my mind to which of the two she was referring.

I heard her crawl into the low doorway of our house, and presently the glow of her tallow lamp shone through the bladder panes of our little dormer window. I thumbed the edge of the axe and fell into a savagely practical reverie.

Winter was coming on, I felt. How hard a winter I could not say. For food we had a limited supply of salted meat, a few baskets of nuts and dried berries, some honey and a half basket of a cereal which I have always imagined to be a kind of rye. Whether the guinea-pigs would remain in the meadow, and whether the deer would not withdraw further into the forest were both moot points. Fish we could always get, and our new hooks of beaten gold—lately golden sovereigns of the legacy—were more effective and stronger than hairpins.

Still it was with serious misgivings that I looked into the future. We had few deerskins for cover, and only our carefully hoarded summer garb of another world to supplement them. My cumbrous deadfalls on the deerpaths were hard to rig, and less than moderately effective, and I

imagined the little brutes were already getting wilder. I had also been too busy with my hunting and building even to think of commencing my first experiments in smelting, and the axe in whose use I had grown so proficient was already showing signs of wear.

Suddenly I swept aside my forebodings. Good heavens! We had surely sufficient proof of the kindness of Providence to make it more than probable we would be even more blessed in the future. Our luck had been phenomenal. An ideal situation; a mildly warm summer which hinted at a not too severe winter; and a fertile country swarming with game. I thought of what might have happened, and forgot that the hard labour of the past ten or eleven weeks had done aught but vastly improve the physical and mental fitness of Marjorie and myself. We were never sick or sorry; enjoyed meals we would have turned from in loathing in England; and a bad cut in my leg had healed itself in three days without attention. I laughed at my momentary pessimism, and braved myself to take a gulp at Marjorie's honey-sweetened brew. This, I found, predisposed me to take another.

I was meditating a third when my quickened ear caught a slight sound above. I put down the jar and listened.

For a moment I could only hear the sleepy squeakings and subdued scufflings of Hildebrand and Company. Naturally they chose this intense moment to make unnecessary noises. Curs-



ing them under my breath I waited for a lull in the conversation.

There was no need. The next intimation of an alien presence was a sound not unlike the slipping of a heavily loaded waggon down the ravine. A rock loosened itself, and went bounding and clattering to the bottom. The air was filled with low mutterings and whining complaints.

Hildebrand was smitten into terror-struck silence. Grasping my axe, I edged up against the rock, where the spiky branches of the hawthorn we had once lived under now presented an effective abattis against intruders who came by way of the ledge. A flicker of the fire showed me the stout pegs and reims of rawhide which anchored the trunk, and I wondered if they would hold. This was a devil of a bear! A bear as large as a cow—almost. At least, as I had estimated it on the cliff top. I could hear the brute sniffing at our breastworks, evidently alarmed at the smell of smoke but frenzied into desperate valour by the counter-smell of honey and the shrieks of Hildebrand, who now fell furiously to the confession of his sins and the preparation of his soul for instant departure.

With a crackling crash the bear charged.

I do not clearly recollect the rest. I have a sort of hazy remembrance of a pandemonium of shrieks, grunts and the sharp snapping of twigs. An appalling dark monstrosity seemed to be towering above me as I stood with one foot on

the tree trunk and the other in the fork of a branch, smiting blindly. I felt the jar of the handle as the blade bit home, and instantaneously the weapon was swept from my hand. Ducking involuntarily I lost my balance, and—horror of horrors!—over I went into the hairy bosom of the bear.

I thought the brute would hug me, but to my surprise I next found myself, yet unembraced but sadly thorn scratched, under its feet. I had time for one shout, one fleeting thought of poor Marjorie, heard a sound like a splitting log overhead—and then for a moment everything seemed to go blank.

Something heavy but yielding was pressing on my face, and threatening me with instant suffocation. I knew at once what it was. It was the bear's paw! I lay quite still and groped for my knife—my last chance for life.

"Are you hurt, Jack?" cried the bear. "Oh, Jack, are you hurt!" Although the foot was the foot of the bear the voice was the voice of Marjorie. For obvious reasons I could not answer immediately, but on attempting to remove the obstruction matters became less complex. I encountered toes.

"I do not think I am hurt," I muttered wearily. "Kindly take your foot off my face."

There was a nervous giggle. "Sorry!" said Marjorie. "I thought you were the bear. Where are you?"



I explained matters, and with a little difficulty managed to get free. A dead bear on one's legs, and one's wife standing on one's head, are serious impediments to the free use of the members. "What happened?" I inquired as I licked my scratches.

"I don't know any more than you do. He knocked the axe out of your hand, I think, so I picked it up, and—and—and then you had disappeared, Jack! I thought he had eaten you," she concluded tearfully, "and I hit him between the eyes with the axe. Stop it now, Jack!" said Marjorie, about five minutes later. "Don't be so childish!"

## CHAPTER VIII

“**J**ACK! Jack! Jack!” in unwearying monotone—how sick I seemed to have grown of the sound of my name—and an insistent prodding of my stiff and aching ribs which seemed to have endured for ages. “Get up and kiss them. They’re sweet!”

“What’s sweet?” I growled; and the blazing sun tickled my nostrils and caused me to sneeze myself into wakefulness. “Good Lord, Marjorie, where did you catch that lot?”

Funny little beggars they were. Two round, black, woolly cubs, with sharp soft noses, splashed with white, and twinkly red-brown eyes. Both were whining bitterly for their mother, who, alas, yet lay stark and bloody in the thorny branches of our tree. “Kiss your children,” said Marjorie, and hugged them both.

I shook my head. “It’s rather brutal, Marjorie, but—can we afford to keep them?”

I got no further. Indeed, I began to imagine that the soul of the bear mother must have hovered whining over her young and, loath to desert them, slipped into the body of her slayer. It is no good arguing with Marjorie; and as I had already exhibited my baseness by drinking all the herb tea—a point well rubbed in—I had to give way. I suggested that she

should stow the honey pot out of reach; and I set to work skinning the bear.

It was not quite so large as I had estimated it, but there was enough of a bearskin to make Marjorie a glorious rug for the winter, and our reserve of salted meat went up with a bound. Indeed I had to trot off that same day on the four mile trip to the sea, fill up our big clay dish with salt water, and light the fire. I hated this job, as it meant constant travelling to and fro to replenish the brine and the firewood—generally with sixty pound loads of firewood to carry on my back over half the distance; and although I had already learned to travel at a dog trot in all my goings and comings it meant the loss of several valuable hours.

I got back to find Marjorie in the wildest excitement. "Cows!" she howled over the cliff's edge. "Come up, quick!"

I scrambled up the ravine and threw myself gasping on the turf. "Where?" I asked, rather disappointed at not finding a few good milkers tethered on the flat.

"Everywhere," said my wife. "What are you looking so grieved about?"

"Thought from the fuss you had caught a cow somewhere. What's the joke?"

"It isn't a joke," growled Marjorie. "Go up and look for yourself."

I honestly believed she was pulling my leg, but being a docile man I put myself to the trouble of climbing the ravine to please her facetious

majesty. At first I saw nothing of note but the red ball of the sun shooting its last rays flatly from the south-west, but as my already trained eyes took in the rest of the outlook I began to understand. As far as one could see the rolling downs to the southward were spotted with blotches of a dirty white—herds of cattle drifting leisurely down to the sea, or rather scattered squadrons of some tremendous migration. And right under my nose, hidden at first by a fold of the ground, was a little white calf. I approached the calf to seize it.

Presently I regained the ravine ; without my prey, indeed, but providentially still a leap and a half ahead of the calf's mother. She followed me down a part of the way—to the four foot jump in fact.

I described the incident to Marjorie.

"That's Mary," she said philosophically. "That's our new cow. I brought her home myself."

"How far did you bring her, Marjorie ?"

"Miles ! We positively flew. I *screamed* for you to come and save me."

I hugged Marjorie until she gasped. "You mustn't stray so far alone," I said anxiously. "You're making me dreadfully nervous."

"*You ?* Going off alone for your pleasure trips to the sea-shore, and leaving poor Marjorie to scrape bearskins ! huh !"

This was brutal. I had literally been driven from home at the point of the fish spear.

“We’ll both interview Mary to-morrow,” I promised, “but we must stick together.” We generally hunted together—in case of accidents—for we were strangers in a very strange land and had no certainty of ever seeing another human face.

I did not for a moment suppose that this pertinacious wretch of a cow would condescend to await our return, but on the following morning I was surprised to find her still within a few hundred yards of the head of the ravine. At least there was *a* cow there, and a calf about the size of the one I had previously attempted to steal. The wild cattle were all of the same creamy white hue, so it was hard to make offhand distinctions.

I came provided with a plaited rawhide lasso and the axe, deeming the former simple weapon more suitable than my bow. I had been practising with the noose as a possible means of catching deer.

I approached the cow on tiptoe, whirling my noose, Marjorie shrieking encouragement from the head of the ravine. Perhaps I should mention that the cow was sitting down, and seemed unconscious of our presence. With a dexterous movement of the wrist I managed to cast the noose over one horn, and then—seeing that I had not exactly done as I intended to do—I thought it best to return to the ravine. I think it *must* have been Mary, for she again followed resolutely to the brink of the four foot jump.

Rather out of breath I paused to explain to Marjorie—who had taken refuge lower down—that the next step in my plan of action was rendered impossible owing to the cow still wearing my rope where I had attached it. In my retreat I had dropped the other end.

“Shall I get another rope?” asked Marjorie.

“Afraid there isn’t one to get,” I said. I thought a minute, and resolved on a desperate expedient. We must get this cow. More especially must we get her calf.

As I have said, the brute was standing on the very brink of a four foot ledge, below which the bed of the ravine again fell away in a slippery grass slope. She seemed frightfully put out at something, for at intervals she brandished her horns and stamped her hoofs, with a low roaring sound—very terrifying to hear. I scratched my nose—silently screwing my courage to the sticking place—and scrambled up again to the bottom of the jump-off, a few feet below the cow’s horns.

The gentle ungulate above me promptly lowered its head, horned the air viciously a few times, and executed a species of war-dance on the brink. I struck upwards with the back of the axe and landed her a sharp rap on her moist, black nose.

This drove her nearly frantic, and the war-dance and horning was repeated with renewed vigour. Waiting my opportunity, and calling to Marjorie to keep well in to the side of the ravine, I stimulated her with another thump.

Suddenly, on the impulse of an extra vicious lunge, her hind hoofs slipped on the slope above and she made a staggering effort to recover herself.

I set my teeth and jumped, more by good luck than good management making good my hold on both fore legs just below the knee. I thought in the next few frenzied seconds that my back muscles would surely crack, but just as I was giving way to despair something slipped above. There was a last furious lunge, a wild bellow, and over the ledge piled a half ton avalanche of living beef. Before she could recover I had her by the tail and was shouting to Marjorie for the axe, which I had dropped.

I am not a man who seeks for much notoriety, but I sometimes regret that there were no more sympathetic spectators of that Homeric struggle than the little white calf which stood above, looking down with wondering eyes on the awful turmoil in the ravine. The air vibrated with the bawling of the struggling monster as, with its hind legs yet propped on the ledge and fore hoofs clawing wildly for foothold below, it fought its last huge fight for freedom. The air was full of clods of earth and loose stones; and above the tumult of the frenzied cow rang the triumphant yells of the two darting, leaping, skin-clad savages snatching at the lashing hoofs and tearing wildly at its last foothold.

Then, as suddenly as the fight began, it was over. Across the poor beast's back Marjorie



had thrown me the axe. One cut across the sinews of the near hind leg finished the business, and with a last defiant roar the great cow slipped and fell.

I would not have liked to have been that cow. First it turned a complete somersault, and then rolled twice over on its back. This brought its head up the ravine against the eastern wall, but the impetus was too great to allow it to regain its foothold. Backward it slid, calling pitifully to its calf and striving to find further support with its poor crippled leg. Then, before I could reach the yet trailing rope and lend it the assistance I had intended, it began to slip, faster and faster, until with a last grand glissade it shot the complete length of the ravine and rolled over and over in the meadow.

At once it attempted to rise, but its injured leg at first prevented this. Finally, at the third effort, it staggered to its feet, and at once began to low for its baby. Feeling rather ashamed of myself I caught the little animal, and with Marjorie's help carried it to its mother. In a manner of speaking we now had a cow and a calf.

I did not anticipate any attempt to escape. To regain the downs the cow would have to limp two and a half miles down-stream ; and to the east, above the lake, the cliffs closed in until the stream plunged over them in a fifty foot waterfall which we had already christened Lower Falls. The deer would not usually attempt to cross below this point, so I made a shrewd guess



that our half hamstrung cow was safe enough ; for the brook, though narrow in places, is unusually deep and rapid.

I expended a little of our precious salt, which I rubbed daily on a smooth rock below. If she ever meditated flight before, the fascinating flavour of the rock settled the question for Mary. She only left it to chase Marjorie and myself across the meadow on her three swift legs. She was a dauntless cow.

And so, feeling I had done a pretty good summer's work in spite of the disfavour of Grindle and Pennywhistle, I decreed to take a holiday.

With our eerie well defended by a new and stouter tree, and the beasts provisioned for three days, we took our bows and went south on the heels of the cattle. Twenty-five miles from Limestone Hollow we camped beneath a solitary tree, and found the hills had trended off to the east and the seashore to the west. Before us stretched a vast sea of waving grasses, flat as a pancake. It was here I had an inspiration.

"Not much use us going any further," suggested Marjorie, as she snapped the sparks from an old Mauser cartridge—once a pencilholder—with a splinter of flint. "There isn't a landmark in a hundred miles."

I looked around from the dim east, by the blank and hazy southern skyline, to where the salt-water-loving cattle had vanished below the western horizon. "I deny the hundred miles," I said, "and anyway there's this tree."

"Then do you want to go on?" inquired Marjorie.

I shook my head. "I've another idea," I said.

I took the axe and, swarming up into the branches, I cleared the uppermost limb. Athwart it I lashed another branch with as much rawhide rope as I felt we could afford. "That ought to last for a year or two, anyhow," I said, as I climbed down. The cross stood out bravely on the edge of the downs—obviously the work of man.

"25 Mls NORTH" I scratched on the trunk below. "If any one *does* come this way," I said to Marjorie, "they can't miss that. Remember what the Hubble-Bubble said about other emigrants?"

There is a watch-tower on the place now. It was, I believe, the first artificial landmark.

We arrived home next day under tragic circumstances. One of the cubs had escaped from confinement and started a fatuous game on the cliff's edge with a deerskin. He had fallen over and was quite dead when we found him. The survivor, yclept Tommy, lived with us for several years to come.

## CHAPTER IX

THE days drew in, and the leaves of the far reaching forest goldened and fluttered down, until the beach of the north shore was strewn with the remnants of the summer finery. Exploration gave way to short expeditions for the more utilitarian purpose of gathering nuts. Beyond this I did little except tinker round the house, set snares for deer—the little forest deer of Marjorieland—and work upon the construction of my furnace. Finally I completed it, a fine edifice of turf—eight foot high and shaped like a beehive. Within I lined it with fireclay, and without I erected a platform as a feeding floor. I had already mined several loads of the bright red hematite, using an oaken stake, fire-hardened and my flint hammer for the purpose. Marjorie, meanwhile, was less usefully employed “discovering” woad.

She is too hasty. If she had consulted me beforehand I could have told her this stuff took time to wear off, and I should have been spared the humiliation of sitting down to meals with a companion whose complexion outshone the mandrill.

Hildebrand also emerged from the bath a filthy sight for any person with a sense of colour

to gaze on. Whereas he had been rabbit-colour he now shone a sort of putrescent purple.

"Marjorie," I said, as I kicked the pot over the cliff, "Marjorie, repent. Go and do some useful work instead."

"I can't," said Marjorie. "How can I go out with a blue face?"

I was sorry for her, and I bravely kissed her purple cheek. "You must stoop to toil," I said, "until your colour scheme fades. I have an idea that the smelting of iron necessitates four things—iron ore, fuel, limestone and quartz. We've got to go and hunt for quartz somewhere or the iron will positively refuse to emerge."

"Then I think it's very silly of it," said Marjorie. "However, if you must go—go. I won't hinder you."

"I want you to come too."

"You said that my face gave you chilblains."

"I know I did—it does—but I love you, Marjorie. Supposing I came home and found you eaten by a bear? I may have to go quite a distance, so you'd better come with me. Please, Marjorie!"

She looked at me as an aristocratic elephant might survey a tadpole. "I heard some talk of chucking me over the cliff, last night," she said, "but I suppose I must make allowances for your weak intellect. I shall amuse myself with your grovellings for a little—'chilblains,' I think it was, you said—and then, if I am pleased with the performance, I may show you where

the quartz is. As usual it's been under your nose for the last three months, but trust you to find out anything for yourself ! ”

One good point about Marjorie is that she never bears malice—so long as she is permitted to have her own way and bully as much as she feels disposed to at the time. “ If you'll stop mussing me about,” she remarked presently, “ I'll take you to the quartz place. It's only as far as the brook you've been crossing about five times a week since we came here. The Hubble-Bubble was here once,” she added an hour later, on the edge of the forest. “ I picked up two of his revolver cartridges—look ? ”

“ I'd forgotten his existence,” I remarked. “ Are you happy here, Marjorie ? ”

“ The answer,” said Marjorie, “ is—hum ! I wonder who chucked all this pile of pebbles on the bank ? A bear, do you think ? ”

“ Gracious ! ” she exclaimed. “ Here's one as heavy as a bullet. Stand up and let me throw it at ye. It's—— Jiminy ! ” she gasped. “ Didn't the Hubble-Bubble say he was a millionaire ? ”

“ He did.”

“ Then I've found his bank—catch ! ”

I caught. “ It's gold ! ” I cried, and fell upon my hands and knees, scrabbling furiously in the pebbly bed of the little river.

“ Consider the blind avarice of this man ! ” mused Marjorie. “ Here am I in a deerskin bathing costume, and a straw hat I made myself——”

“Shut up!” I roared.

“And my face painted blue in token of great sorrow,” continued Marjorie, propping her livid—but rounded—chin on her bare knees, “and he asking me if I’m *happy*——”

I threw a stone at her and continued digging. I hauled out a nugget which must have weighed close on forty pounds, and dropped two five pound lumps of the precious metal beside it. The richness of the “placer” was inestimable. “Marjorie,” I said severely, “if you really *like* to do your cooking and washing-up in unglazed earthen pots—I’ll stop.”

Marjorie gave a howl of joy. “Oh, *Clever!* I never thought of that. I’m sorry I made my face blue now, but I thought it was the correct thing, and anyhow I’ll be as beautiful as ever in a week—won’t I?” She slid down into the water and joined me in my search for gold.

During the ensuing weeks the wondering deer heard the unceasing thud of my flint hammer on the soft metal. Pots of gold I made, hammering it round a water-worn stone, and trimming the edges with sharp fragments of flint. I made a big golden basin, big enough for Marjorie to bathe indoors—or do her primitive laundry work in—when the lake should get too cold for comfort. I even contrived a frying pan, and a dinner set, all except the knives, before the “pocket” became exhausted.

I was rather relieved, by the way, when it *did* give out. Marjorie—who seemed to be



intoxicated with the savage life she was leading at this time—caused me a good deal of distress by hinting at a nose ring. Marjorie's nose !

Gradually the winter closed in upon us, heralded by cold winds and bitter rain changing into sleet and then into snow. The long dark evenings when we sat indoors over the glow of a tallow lamp and made our first experiments in spinning fibre were trying both to temper and health. We were cheered a bit, however, by the successful smelting of a few small ingots of pig-iron—poor, brittle stuff it was too. In the first week in December I killed the cow, and took the calf up to Limestone Hollow. It was fortunate for us, and another illustration of our more than providential good luck, that I did this.

I think it was the second day after I killed the cow. I know it was just after nightfall, and that I was at the time occupied in hanging strips of salted beef to smoke over a well piled fire. The ground was white with the first snow-fall, and a chilly moon—three-quarters full—shone through ragged tears in the dull canopy of cloud which hung over us. It was a raw, depressing, melancholy winter's evening. For the first time my thoughts ran back yearningly to fire-grates and curtains, and the bright cheerfulness of the electric light and incandescent gas of a lost civilisation.

Suddenly it came and unexpectedly—but I knew at once what the sound portended. How I knew I cannot say. Perhaps a million years

ago my forefathers heard the shuddering cry, on some such night as this, and handed down the memory to their children. All I know is that I heard, I understood, and I quailed before it.

Wolves ! Wolves ! Wolves ! The very sound of the word had a nameless horror for me as a little boy ; and now——

Fleeting across the meadow in the moonlight came the deer—a flitting shadow of darkness—and I caught the light crunching of its hoofs, and the scurry of a hundred padded feet in the dark forest. Marjorie slipped her hand in mine.

“What is it, Jack ? she said, bravely. “Danger ? ”

“Not exactly danger, old girl, but—but look ! ” And as I spoke the whole scallywag crew broke cover simultaneously. Never can I forget the first glimpse of those lean bodies and bushy tails streaming past below, and the sickening sense of impotence and utter loneliness. That was the ghastly aspect of the situation. These brutes—horrible enough in old, old, settled countries—had yet to learn the fear of man.

We went back into the hut, and prayed—prayed hard and sincerely—and we piled our fire high. But my faith was sorely shaken nevertheless, and a sleepless night I made of it. It was not until sunrise—when I looked out and saw the lake sleeping peacefully below and heard the snow trickling in little rivulets from the cliffs under the rays of a warm sun—that I felt any return of confidence. Even then I was almost



harsh in my insistence that Marjorie should not stir from Limestone Hollow, whilst I sneaked down to inspect the fishing lines. Even Marjorie's frightened face, when she found me roused at last, could not avail her now. For a brief period I was top dog in Limestone Hollow.

Of course they came back—I had expected that, and they were apparently loath to disappoint me. They hunted nightly down the meadow, and before their depredations the frightened deer retired further and further into the forest. Even the guinea-pigs had vanished. Not only did they clear the valley of game, but for twenty-four harrowing hours they actually besieged Limestone Hollow itself. Their leader, an old grey-muzzled dog wolf, I can see now, sitting on his haunches at the foot of the cliff, his tongue lolling and his jaws relaxed in a sort of mock-jovial grin. I took a particular hatred to this gentleman, and determined to teach him and his gang a much needed lesson.

At the first arrow he glanced contemptuously, lolled his tongue a bit further and squinted up at me for all the world like an impudent dog. I dropped a second over the ledge.

Mr. Wolf jumped this time. The shaft stuck quivering in the turf, not two feet from where he had been sitting. Before he could make up his mind what this whistling thing might be, I had notched a third. "Just one more, for luck," I said. "I think I'm getting my eye in."

"Whang!" went my bowstring of plaited

gut, and two pairs of anxious eyes followed the flight of the missile more intently than ever golfer—in a “Cup Final”—followed the trajectory of his drive.

“Whop!” came the answering impact from below, and instantly the air was rent by a devils’ chorus of yells and whines. “First blood!” I cheered, and kissed my maiden bow. “He’s down, Marjorie, he’s down!”

He was with a vengeance! The pointed stake had penetrated fairly between the shoulder-blades, and in a few convulsive leaps our erstwhile persecutor rolled over on his side. Instantly his retainers turned upon him in a body, and whilst they struggled for a mouthful of the departed chieftain Marjorie and I sent arrow after arrow into the boiling mob. It took five deaths to convince the survivors that their own precious skins were in danger, but finally they sullenly withdrew to the furnace. Around this they seated themselves, evidently finding the warmth—it had been in use when they first arrived on the scene—agreeable to their mangy hides.

Later I ventured to charge the gang—from the shelter of the ravine—with a flaming torch in either hand. It was a risky piece of bluff, but it succeeded. They ran like rabbits.

The worst effect of this siege was that my furnace froze on me, leaving a sow which choked the tuyeres and defied all my efforts to dislodge it. Finally I had to pull down the whole edifice, thereby losing the labour of months.

Said Marjorie, contemptuously, as I sadly surveyed my pigs of iron: "I don't believe you could have done much with 'em in any case. If I couldn't make better iron than that I'd go and hang myself."

"Well, make it, then!" I snapped. "Purely destructive criticism isn't much use at any time."

"Give me some of that red stuff," said Marjorie, "and tie up your jaw. I'm cross." We had seen no wolves for a week and her spirits were beginning to rise. Like most bullies Marjorie is a coward at heart—but that is our secret.

"I'm sure it's all that limestone and quartz and rubbish you fling in," she continued later, as she busied herself with the bellows. "*How* can you expect to make iron with a lot of nasty stones?"

"Very well, then!" I said. "I'm not contradicting you. Go on and make it for yourself, your own way." It is, as I have said before, no use arguing with Marjorie.

Thereat she made a fire of charcoal and put lumps of hematite in the centre thereof. She sat over this for some time, combing her hair with a wooden comb and singing strange incantations. I regret to say that the larger part of her chant was given over to slurring remarks on my intelligence.

This went on for several hours, during which she wasted a good deal of charcoal. I ventured to inquire how the foundry was getting on.

“Blow it with the bellows.” ordered Marjorie. “I don’t think it’s hot enough.”

I blew, and she heaped on more charcoal. Again I blew, until my arms were tired and the golden spout of the bellows began to melt. I asked her how long this was to continue, but she only took the bellows from me and blew in her turn. She blew until I was ashamed and took them back. Thereafter I blew and grumbled until nightfall.

Then we raked off the remains of the fire and—I have to confess it—I discovered a large spongy mass of quite workable iron. Marjorie’s bland ignorance had, as usual, triumphed, although why I could not then have told you. I supposed it was due to the purity of the ore—which is remarkably clean.

I draw a discreet curtain over the subsequent scene. I did not beat her, as she deserved. I am a fool.

## CHAPTER X

I COULD fill a good many chapters if I chose with the story of the first winter. How the wolves came back and besieged us a second time; how the lake froze for three weeks and we caught great catches of fish through holes in the ice; how I hit my thumb forging my first knife, and Marjorie laughed. It was quite an eventful winter.

I had been experimenting with buckskin since I killed my first deer, and had finally solved the problem. In the long evenings I sat at home kneading my leather, and dressing it with a preparation of fish oil, for I thought it high time Marjorie had some better clothing material than roughly-dressed skins with the hair on. I also worked hard at my forge. Civilisation was advancing apace.

Everybody worked in Limestone Hollow, except Tommy, the bear-cub, snoring slothfully under the white calf's fodder. Even Hildebrand and his kindred worked. They were fruitful, and multiplied all the summer, and in winter they did a power of tasting. Even the white calf worked at times, for it learned to carry baskets of charcoal.

But work is the most uninteresting thing to write about. Even to perform work is disgusting

to any sane and healthy man, unless he is an artist by nature or deeply in love.

Yet all the hard labour that a man may bear and live through would have been better than what befell in the spring.

I do not remember exactly how it began. I suppose it was the strain of the long winter, although the days were lengthening apace by now and the wolves had loped off into the mountains again. Anyway, it was on the twenty-fifth of March—I remember the date—that we had our first real quarrel.

I had made a buckskin suit for Marjorie, and I was rather proud of myself and imagined it might soothe her rather ruffled temper—for I had done the work on the quiet. She knew I was contemplating the feat, but had no idea I had already started to accomplish it. I was a bit dashed when my offering was passed over with one brief, contemptuous glance.

“I’m not going to wear that skirt,” said Marjorie, and went on with her spinning. “I told you that before.”

“Well, I’m sure *I’m* not going to wear it,” I laughed. “Let’s use it for something else. I’d forgotten.”

“You hadn’t,” said Marjorie. “You imagined that if you persisted in your own silly way I’d be fool enough to give in.” She twirled at her yarn viciously, and I cowered before the tempest.

“I told you twice,” she said. “It’s only an encumbrance.”

“Cut it into another pair of breeks, then. I wonder, by the way, what Mrs. Macfarlane would say to your present ideas on clothing?”

At the mention of her old nurse's name Marjorie began to cry. I saw I had put my foot into it and tried to comfort her. To my own great distress she drove me away from her and complained that she was lonely. Finally, I had to leave the problem of her tantrum unsolved. I walked over to the forge and began work on a spear head.

I suppose I was inclined to become self-centred from lack of intercourse with other men. Anyhow I had developed a bad habit of brooding, which trick sometimes led me to feel insanely angry without the justification of some one to be angry with. Hammering at the stubborn iron, I fell into one of these sullen fits. Some vague enemy seemed to have done me an immense wrong and my soul thirsted for vengeance.

Presently the devil whispered in my ear that Marjorie was unreasonable. I countered with the reply that she never was anything else.

“Besides,” I added, “it's half due to her extraordinarily perverted sense of humour.”

These two quips put me in a good temper, and His Satanic Majesty fell back several yards in disorder.

“Tailor!” he snarled.

“I don't quite grasp your meaning, Sieur Devil?”



"Tailor! Maker of clothes!" sneered the adversary. "Woman's work!" he added as an afterthought.

"Not rough work like that," I cried. "Besides, I did that job for love."

The devil turned pale at the abhorred word, before which even he must tremble. "Did you get your account settled?" he stammered, as a last shot.

Unfortunately the shot told. I was off my guard at the moment—secure in the feeling that I had scored. "I didn't mean it in that sense——" I began; and at that moment a spark fell on my hand.

"Please, don't swear!" called Marjorie from the kitchen. She said it nastily. I especially objected to the "please."

"The fact of the matter," said the devil, "is that you are getting too easy-going. You are doing great harm to Marjorie by spoiling her in this manner. It's a bad thing when people are ungrateful for real kindness and thoughtfulness. Consider me," he added, "not as the devil, but in the light of a brunette guardian angel sent to advise you on this important matter. Think it over."

Which very reasonable request I acquiesced in. I thought the matter over—thoroughly—and as my mind dwelt on Marjorie's ingratitude the pot of rancour again began to boil. This time I had a definite object to hate.

I was interrupted by a hand on my elbow.



Marjorie stood by my side in loose shirt, flapping leathern pyjamas and calf high buskins. She looked like a rather self-conscious pirate, only much prettier, unless pirates were very beautiful indeed. Furthermore, she seemed inclined to make friends.

I looked at her once, disfavouredly, and went on with my hammering. "Very well," said Marjorie, "sulk!" and she flounced off into the house. When next she emerged she was back in a shabby old guinea-pigskin "bathing-gown," with the rolled cowhide thrown plaidwise across her neck. She was more like a dilapidated kangaroo with a hump than a human being, and I felt very angry.

My anger seemed to make small difference, however. She never even glanced at me, but went whistling down to the lake with Tommy the bear at her heels.

I resolved to be firm. Until she apologised properly for her conduct in the morning—or did something indefinite like that—I would not even speak to her. I went on with my hammering until noon.

Twelve o'clock arrived and she had not returned. It was, of course, open to me to have my lunch without her; but I did not feel hungry somehow. I worked on for another hour and grew, if anything, more morose.

One o'clock came. No Marjorie! I would wait another hour and then——

"You can whistle for her now," grinned the

delighted devil. "Perhaps she hasn't noticed the time; or perhaps she is asleep. Go to the edge of the cliff and—whistle for her."

I went, rather more rapidly than I had intended; and in the grip of a sudden anxiety I looked down across the meadow for the delinquent.

It was very peaceful in the March sunshine. The only thing visible, except grass, sand and water, was the stack of timber on the lake's margin—timber I had cut and towed across during the winter. "She must be behind it," I muttered. "Fishing from the raft maybe." I whistled long and shrill.

Then I called. There was a squawk, and a heavy flapping as a heron flew from the rushes; but no answering hail. Suddenly a species of penumbra—as if a giant hand had interposed a smoked glass between the world and the sun—seemed to fall upon the landscape. Another hand—a cold one—was clutching at my vitals.

"Marjorie!" I called, and I listened with every nerve atingle.

"Marjorie!" drawled the mocking echo. For a few moments the valley rang with her name.

I instinctively caught up my hunting gear, and fled. Down the ravine I went in ten foot bounds and raced across the grass to the water's edge. In a sort of ugly dream I noticed that the raft was missing, and next moment I was racing westward along the beach. Half way to the

outlet I tripped on a stone and fell heavily ; but this was fortunate, in a way, for the shock and the physical pain helped to clear my brain.

I rose unsteadily, and again swept the lake for a glimpse of the raft. One of two things must have happened. Either she had been drowned, or else she had been swept down stream. In the former case the raft would be floating somewhere on the sheet of water before me.

The assurance that it was *not* helped to balance my reeling senses a little more. I was becoming quite calm and collected. "She had the bear," I muttered hopefully. "If anything had happened to her he would have come home."

As a matter of fact I doubt he would have. He was an extraordinary beast, for a bear, and loved Marjorie devoutly. Still it helped me to believe that he would have returned. Anyhow, he would have done so if she was drowned, for the body would sink.

Marjorie's body ! I shuddered, and set my teeth. "She's been swept down stream," I decided.

The lake discharged itself, at its south-western extremity, into a fairly broad and deep river. The current at the outlet is considerable, but not dangerous. Two men can row a boat up against it, although one person on a cumbrous log raft, with a single oar in the stern, would be in a rather awkward fix. I hoped, however, that she might have made the shore lower down.

I trotted down the bank for a couple of miles, but met no trace of her. Then I got in a fresh panic and climbed the cliffs to the south, whence I could follow the meanderings of the river to the sea. I thought I could discern the raft in the far distance—down in the marshes that fringe the estuary.

Half an hour later I arrived there, to find I had been following an old uprooted tree trunk.

I had got myself pretty well in hand by this time, however. I leaned upon my unstrung bow by the sea shore, and revolved the possibilities. Firstly she might have effected a landing at some point higher up, which I had missed by taking short cuts; secondly she might have been swept down the coast to the south-west by the tide; and thirdly—I choked somewhat over this theory—the loss of the raft might have no connection with her own disappearance.

“But the bear would have come home,” I insisted. “Another bear would not have attacked *him*.” The third theory I refused to entertain.

I turned south-west along the shore and broke into my long-distance trot. The sea, where our river discharges its waters, is in reality a big inlet, or estuary—I knew this already, for in clear weather one could see the mountains on the other side—and the tide creates a strong current, sweeping south-west along the shore, as it ebbs and reversing again with the flow. It was just on the turn now—extreme low tide—there-

fore the probability was that Marjorie had been carried down.

I may say here—writing in cold blood, after the lapse of years—that I did not dwell, as I ran, on my harshness at our last parting. This may sound strange and unnatural, but it is nothing of the kind. I was an able-bodied male, in full strength, and had been suddenly bereft of all I loved or cared for in the world. Either the shock of it had stunned me, or else I was too absorbed in the effort to regain what I had lost. I was more like a hound on a hot scent than a reasoning being.

A mile or two down the coast a thong of my sandal burst, and the sole doubled up under my instep. It was a trifling matter, but I whined like a dog as I fumbled it off my foot—I would not wait even to repair it. With one foot shod and one bare I ran on over the rocks.

Thrice I fell, the way being rough, and my eyes set on the sea. Each time I fell heavily, and my left arm dripped blood from a gash on the elbow. I never noticed it.

I do not know how many miles I ran in this fashion. It is only a hazy dream of sandy beaches, alternating with rocky promontories whose crust of barnacles tore the callous skin of my unprotected foot. It must have been a long way down the coast that I came to a halt.

The shore was getting flatter here, and the waves broke far out on the edge of a long sub-

merged beach. Here and there a few scattered rocks showed their heads among the gentle combers. Beyond this again the seashore vanished in a swamp where the wildfowl already scuttered about among the coarse grass and the clumps of waving reeds. Far out to sea I could just discern what appeared to be a tongue of land running counter to the trend of the shore. It seemed more than probable that the tidal current would sweep out past this ; so unless I chose to run right round the shore—and a bee-line across the water was a good ten miles—I might as well abandon my search.

Then I became aware that I was very tired. So weary in fact that I unconsciously sat down.

I do not think that I sat for very long. I was dazed with sorrow and fatigue. I heard some one sobbing heavily—rending, broken-hearted sobs—and I wondered who it might be. I never thought of suspecting myself.

So I sat by the sea and cried, because I had lost my wife.

## CHAPTER XI

**I** WAS roused again from my torpor. Something had plucked me by the sleeve, and my dull brain was vaguely endeavouring to classify the sensation.

If it needed stimulation, however, stimulation was not long lacking. The second notice I received of another presence cleared my senses in a twinkling. I was grabbed by the slack of my deerskin shirt, shaken like a rat, and thrown on my back a good five yards from where I had been sitting. Immediately the fear of death was on me ; and cause enough I had.

Imagine the head of a serpent, flat and cruel, with long serried teeth running back the whole length of its evil skull. A serpent, moreover, about five sizes larger than the biggest python I had ever clapped eyes on in the Zoo ; at least so it appeared to me ; for only the head and six or seven feet of its scaly neck were visible, the rest being hidden by a cleft in the rocks. It was dark green above, shading to white below, the sharp lizard's nose being covered by broad plates of glistening scale. In its rat-trap of a mouth was locked a good square foot of my shirt ; and—this puzzled me at the time—the evil snout of it was deeply gashed by a long



clean cut from which blood still trickled. With a shout of terror I jumped to my feet and hastily strung my bow.

There was a flopping among the rocks as I did so, and with a convulsive movement the pretty creature heaved itself forward and came completely into view. Then I shouted again with sheer surprise, for behold it was not a snake at all—nothing more nor less than a giant plesiosaurus, a monster whose modelled likeness I had looked upon in many museums.

Fortunately for me the brute appeared as stupid as it was sluggish. As it shuffled its turtle back and great swag belly across the sand on its unwieldy flippers, I could hardly realise that it meant mischief, so pitifully vague were its movements. Perhaps this apparent stupidity is in reality an advantage. I was so overcome with contempt that I almost allowed it to get me within range of that ten foot serpentine neck. I slashed at it with my new machete—a heavy moon-shaped weapon of iron with the cutting edge on the inside of the crescent—and the jaws snapped within a foot of me.

I ran back about twenty yards, notching an arrow as I ran, circled, and let drive at the beast's flank. The shaft thudded home behind the great flipper, just below where the hard green armour of its back joined the smaller white scales of the flank and belly. The head whirled round, snapping angrily at the wound,



and I heard my arrow crackle into matchwood in the powerful jaws.

I ran back another ten yards and waited, but the plesiosaur had evidently had enough; or else—what seemed quite probable—the great stupid beast had forgotten about me. Suddenly he turned and lumbered off towards the edge of the marsh.

I followed, and there behind a tongue of earth, hidden thus far by the screen of coarse grass, I saw a thing which turned me cold and sick. Gently rising and falling on the incoming tide, half afloat and half stranded, was our raft.

Oh, my God! It is many, many years ago, but the horror of that moment is frozen into my memory as if etched with biting acids. I can hardly bear to write about it even now, for the rough deck of split poles, was streaked and splashed with maroon stains of dried blood.

And this devilish saurian watching over it! The gash on its face needed no further explanation now; for Marjorie had been armed with a machete like my own.

However, it is no use burdening my readers with a sorrow they could never comprehend. God forbid that any should ever be in a position to do so. If I had been other than dead beat, and already in a semi-dazed condition with horror and grief, I believe I would have ended it there. As it was, I stood stupidly staring whilst the great lizard plunged past the abandoned raft to the deeper water.

Presently it lowered its head and plucked at something. The raft heaved and floated, and I perceived that the beast had hold of the end of the mooring rope. With that curious, worrying movement I had before experienced in my own person it shook the rope, evidently found it distasteful, and spat it out again. A second or two later it repeated this performance ; and the raft floated out a little further, caught in some eddy and drifted out to sea.

Swiftly, but methodically, I shot three arrows, the second of which stuck fast in the beast's throat, out of reach of its teeth. It made a loud hissing noise and shuffled away from the raft. A fourth arrow glanced from its hard back plates and sent it plunging forth into the deep, where it swam off steadily in the direction of the distant shore.

I waded out and collected my arrows. I did not know how many more of the monsters there might be ; but then, on the other hand, I did not particularly care.

I never attempted to get the raft ashore. Why should I ? I turned inland across the downs, taking the shortest way back to what had been my home. I arrived there some time in the small hours of the morning.

. . . . .

I have heard it argued that work is the great cure-all for all human sorrows. It may be so to some natures, but I did not find it so. I worked

for ten days without ceasing, and at the end of that time I found I had accomplished practically nothing—nor could I remember what I had been employed upon, or what my ultimate intention might be. Come to think of it I had no particular goal to strive towards. I had the wherewithal to prolong my own life until such time as I might be permitted to lay down a burden which had become intolerable to me. What more did I want ?

I abandoned the house I had built for her. I could not bear to sit inside with my memories and my shattered dreams, so I folded the little buckskin suit and placed it with her other things on the bearskin. Then I lay outside, or, when it rained, I sometimes crawled into the kitchen for shelter. When I found myself hungry I hunted for food, in a listless sort of way, and I suppose I obtained enough to keep up my strength, because I went on with my aimless “work.”

Oh, Marjorie ! Marjorie ! If it hadn't been for you I never would have been worth the rope to hang me—I was always too arrogantly stubborn and too fond of a change. Why did you go off and leave me, after you had tamed me and bent my stiff neck to submit to your will ?

Once, I think, I must have gone completely insane for the time being, because I again found myself down by the marsh where I had fought the plesiosaurus. I do not remember going there

at all. I can recollect that I went out to catch fish in the lake—and, indeed, I had my fish spear with me—but from that moment my mind leaps, as though I had been temporarily dead, to a sharp awakening on the shore by the marsh.

It was night. The tide was far out, for I could hear the low-pitched crash of the breakers beyond the long, flat beach. There was enough starlight to see that the latter was dry. I was gazing out to sea and—do not blame me, for I was mad, mad, mad, as mad as the poor lunatic who had sent Marjorie to this hateful land—I was whimpering like a dog.

I seemed to see a faint gleam of fire for a moment, but it blinked out again. Then I looked harder and the whole promontory opposite blazed from end to end with will-o'-the-wisp lanterns of my own imagining. I remembered where I was and what had happened—screamed and fled. At least I heard a scream or cry of sorts, and I suppose it was myself.

Until noon of the following day I lay in a sort of torpor broken by strange dreams. Once Marjorie came to me in English clothes and explained that she was not dead, but had gone home again, having found the way. She said she was quite happy, and that she had married Angus Crawley for his money. Of course I knew that was a lie—he never had any money—so I looked again, and then noticed for the first time that it was Crawley himself that spoke.

Then my dream changed, and I saw Marjorie and the raft far away out on an immeasurable ocean. I could see her plainly, but at the same time it appeared that she was millions of miles away. Then I knew she was not dead, and called with ten thousand voices, which she seemed not to hear, and again the dream changed.

This time I was sitting by the fire and weeping—this last I actually *did*, for the first time since my loss—my face was stiff with dried tears when I awoke. It seemed my heart had broken now and death was close upon me. I yearned to die, and prayed that it might come quickly.

Then I heard a step behind me, and before I could turn her arms were around me, and before my own wild laughter could awake me again—again the dream changed.

This time it was extremely vivid and clear. A voice thundered through the air above me. It said :

“Is it enough?”

There was a pause—a pause that seemed to endure endless aeons of time—and then :

“It is enough,” said a very quiet, small voice—a whisper so faint as hardly to be heard.

And then I seemed to be running madly, south, across the downs. Beneath the great tree where I had lashed the Cross I paused and——

“No further!” boomed the terrible first voice.

“Look south!” whispered the second.

And I looked south ; and all my being rose within me and clutched me by the throat.

For across the endless grassy plain came a small, staggering figure, and larger it grew, and nearer it came, until in a frenzy of joy and thankfulness I held her—Marjorie herself, worn and wasted, but, thank God, still living—held her once more in my arms and knew that it was for ever.

Whereat the greater voice again boomed forth : “ It is enough,” it reverberated through the sky, “ go south.”

And laughing I woke with the echo of the words dying in my ears.

Thereat a strange exultation seized upon me. This thing was too real to be any common dream. I grasped my weapons and sped hot-foot southwards—an Eveless Adam in quest of his helpmeet.

I ran southwards—weary as I was from my long, delirious journey overnight—at such a pace as to reach the tree an hour before nightfall. There I cast down the bundle of supplies I had brought for Marjorie and sank gasping beside them. The sweat broke in rivulets from my burning face, and my lungs laboured as if they would burst, but my heart was lifted up within me. I had remembered something which Marjorie herself—in the utter, unquestioning purity of her faith—had told me : “ And this,” I said, “ I shall test to the uttermost. Dead or alive, I believe I am going to see her once more.” And then I arose, and looked southward in the fading



light—and across the plain came a small, swift, staggering figure.

. . . . .

“Curse God and die! Curse God and die!” whispered the original cause of the trouble which had come upon us. I had fallen flat on my face and was biting at the turf—a thing I had imagined no white man ever does except under the influence of purely physical agony. It was not Marjorie.

I struggled for a while before answering my tempter. “It’s all right,” I said finally—*aloud*—“I still believe.”

And then, since we are never burdened beyond our strength, I was mercifully allowed a short spell of unconsciousness.

My oblivion cannot have lasted long. When I managed to totter on to my legs once more the strange person coming across the plain was still some distance away. It was a man. He was stark naked, and with a skin almost as dark as mahogany, although the unkempt beard and the long, matted hair were those of a European. He advanced by short, tottering dashes, at the end of which he usually fell on his face. Then he would slowly climb up again and stagger a little closer, throwing his arms wildly and feebly upwards. His face was turned to the Cross, and he was dreadfully emaciated.

I suppose I have made it pretty clear by this time that I am more than a little selfish by nature.



If I had not been I should not, perhaps, have taken the loss of Marjorie to heart as I did. Also it would have been natural in an unselfish man to forget his own bereavement at the sight of this poor struggling sufferer.

I am afraid I only stood still beneath the tree and watched him as if he had been some curious animal.

I never moved until he fell at my feet.

## CHAPTER XII

I SURVEYED the new-comer with a dull interest. He had fallen full length on his face under the tree, and was moaning incoherently to himself. I supposed, by his appearance, that he must be an aboriginal inhabitant of our—"my" I corrected, and choked on the word—new world. I was mistaken in this, however. As I forced a spoonful of cold herb tea between his clenched teeth, the unfortunate man gave a shudder and opened his eyes.

I smiled and nodded. "Don't fret yourself," I said, "you're safe enough now."

At the sound of the English words the man gave an inarticulate cry. I bent down, for his lips were moving, and I saw he wanted to speak. A new light had suddenly dawned upon me.

"Who are you?" he whispered.

I told him I was an Englishman like himself, but advised him not to excite himself at the moment by asking questions. Meantime I busied myself kindling a fire and warmed some soup for him. He gulped it down frantically, and I had to use force to prevent him from choking himself. He pled for more, but I shook my head. "Presently," I promised. "Lie still and don't talk. You're quite safe here."

He seemed inclined to obey me, although he

still eyed the food. I spread a deerskin on top of the poor fellow and advised him to sleep. He nodded wearily, and I turned once more to the fire.

I was interrupted in my operations by a sharp cry from my patient. He had thrown the skin from him and, propped on one elbow, was pointing out over the plain.

"All right," I said soothingly. "There's nothing there."

"Yes—yes—yes! Woman!"

"Good heavens!" I cried in disgust. "Why didn't you say so before?"

I was spared any further disappointment, for somehow I never for a moment imagined that he could have encountered Marjorie. I found the woman—a living skeleton with a sheepskin round its waist in lieu of clothing—about five miles back on the man's tracks. She was unconscious, and I had to carry her in my arms as far as the tree, which I was hardly able to do after all my previous exertion.

However, I got her in, and I laid them side by side under the branches where once I had picnicked so cheerfully with Marjorie. It looked almost like an omen, but it did not trouble me. I was quite ready to abandon Limestone Hollow and the land we had imagined to have been given specially to ourselves. No doubt these two people could fill our place equally well.

So through the night I nursed them, giving them small spoonfuls of soup at short inter-

vals, and keeping a sharp look-out for possible dangers of the darkness. Next morning the man was well enough to walk, but I ventured to stay another twenty-four hours before putting them to the test of the long journey back. I think I was wise, for the man only just managed it, and I had to carry the woman practically the whole distance.

And that again fanned the flame of my sorrow. For somehow my vagrant memory would keep harking back to the day—only a few months before—when Marjorie and I had played follow-my-leader up the golden brook. The rules of the game were simple, and in accordance with the tenor of our existence—except when there was danger afoot—in the pioneer days of Limestone Hollow. Marjorie led, and I followed. She could climb like a goat, and swim like a seal, and she could wriggle through unscathed where the thorns were like to have rent me asunder. She had nearly killed me, and she had added to my miseries by shamming lame four miles from home, and making me carry her most of the way back.

And now the pain became like fish hooks being dragged through one's brain. I felt I could bear no more—and I did not have to bear it. Suddenly I shook with laughter.

I cannot say why exactly—perhaps it was a touch of temporary insanity—but a curious conviction had seized me. It died down, more or less, in the space of an hour or so, but from

that moment I found I had a new grip on myself. My grand prophetic dream had apparently been turned into a mockery ; I had nothing to go on but a curious coincidence and the unmistakable fact that things confidently expected and things actually encountered could not by any stretch of imagination be included in the same category ; but I went on my way with a hope of sorts to buoy me, whereas before I had none.

“It is, if you like to put it that way,” the Hubble-Bubble had said to Crawley. Supposing that was indeed death that Marjorie had led me through in the Whistling Adit ? I had followed, and I had found her. It occurred to me—what I yet maintain—that I am more blessed than any other man, having attained a higher height of instruction, and a clearer glimpse of the land whither God would lead me.

I asked the man, whose name I found to be Michael Quelch, how he had got himself into such a fix.

“It’s a long story, sir,” he said, “and I doubt you’ll not believe it when I tell yer—— S’pose you’re an Englishman, sir ?” he broke off, looking at me doubtfully.

I nodded, and he continued his tale glancing sideways with awestruck eyes at my strange garments and primitive weapons.

“Well, I ’ad an extraordinary bit o’ luck last August,” he went on. “Leastways I thought it was luck *then*. A friend give me a Spanish Lottery ticket—leastways I lent ’im some money

and the ticket was for security—and before 'e could redeem it I find I've won a cool two 'undred pound. Think of that ? ”

“H'm !” I interrupted. “It was an unexpected—and misused—legacy brought me here. Wages of sin, I presume. Go on.”

“Well, I'm what yeh might call a natch'lly cultured man,” continued Quelch, “and I always 'ad a taste for travel like. I chucked my job right away, for I'm like that. When I get it in my 'ead I mean to do a thing—w'y, I do it. An' damn the espense say I !

“I 'ad a fancy for a bit o' travelling, as I say—seein' life, like—so I went to Constantinople.”

He paused, and again eyed me surreptitiously. He evidently looked upon this as rather a dare-devil feat—I suppose it was to him—and anticipated comment.

“Quite a long way to go,” I remarked.

“Yes ; but I'm *like* that. Damn the espense when yer out to enjoy yerself !

“Saw the effectks of the bombardment,” he jerked. “Cook's Personally Conducted to the Near East. 'Orrible !”

“Did they allow tourists to visit the town ? ” I asked. At the time of my own translation they had been at it hammer and tongs all along the Bosphorus, and Cook's Tours sounded a trifle exotic.

“Ow, yes ! That was all over by then. They was fightin' up in Roumania, an' in the Crimea, but Constantin' was quiet enough. I went ashore

by myself with Miss Watkins—that lady you’re carryin’—not wishing to mix with the common ’erd.”

His voice trailed away, and I saw that he was too fatigued to talk any more, so I postponed hearing the rest of his story till we should have arrived at Limestone Hollow. We got in at nightfall, having accomplished the twenty-five miles in fourteen hours.

I made Miss Watkins as comfortable as I could in the kitchen, gave them a square meal, and as many skins as they needed for warmth and covering, and I explained that they might consider themselves at home—with the sole proviso that they should not enter the house. I could not yet bring myself to permit that.

Warmed with meat Quelch took up his tale.

“Miss Watkins was on the boat with us,” he explained. “She was goin’ out to people in Egypt or somew’ere. I forget now. Any’ow we got friendly like, an’ I persuaded ’er to come ashore for a bit in Constantin’”—he grinned meaningly, and I felt a little touch of nausea at the man’s baseness and his oily self-satisfaction. “Go on,” I ordered curtly.

Quelch jumped. “No offence!” he muttered. “A man’s a man.”

“Not when he gives the show away, Mr. Quelch,” I remarked. I appeared to have penetrated his armour, for he hurried on with his recital in some confusion.

“Well, we ’adn’t been long ashore,” he said



sulkily, "before we run into a stranger—an Englishman—rum lookin' cove with a long neck an'—what are you smilin' at?"

"Never mind. You struck up an acquaintance with this Englishman?"

"Yes. Pleasant spoken gentleman 'e was; though 'e'd a queer way of talking—jerky like—I supposed it was his bein' through the bombardment 'ad shook his nerve. 'E asked us up to 'is house. Said he ran a boardin'-house, only all 'is boarders had quit owing to the fighting. Damned liar I call 'im! 'E only said that to get me up there, figurin' I might be lookin' for a room I s'pose.

"Anyhow I went—not suspectin'—an' Miss Watkins went too. Wish to 'eaven I'd not been such a silly ijit!"

He fell into a sorrowful muse over his fate, and I had to remind him that the tale remained half told. "Eh?" he cried. "Oh! The gent in Constantin'! W'ere was I?"

"Oh, yes! 'E gets us inside, and just when I was beginnin' to suspect some hokey-pokey business—for there was no furniture to speak of, an' no servants or anything—I find 'e's locked the door of the room we're in, an' drawn a revolver. Miss Watkins screams, but I walked right up to him, calm like.

" "'Ère!' I said, 'you put that down!'"

"Did he do it?" I asked. I fear a growing disbelief in Mr. Quelch's alleged boldness lent a taint of sarcasm to the inquiry.

“I don’t think! It was a pretty close thing for a minute or two. I’d ’ave grappled with ’im if ’e’d give me a chance. What is it old Kipling says :

“*There is neither east nor west, border, nor breed, nor birth,  
W’en two strong men stand face to face——*”

“Oh, bother Kipling!” I said shortly. “Tell me what happened next.”

“I was covered by the revolver,” said Mr. Quelch melodramatically, “so what could I do? Adela—that’s Miss Watkins, sir—fell on her knees an’ implored ’im to let us go, but I looked ’im squarely in the eye. It was a tense moment.

“You mus’ understan’ this creechur with ’oom I ’ad to deal was a lunatic. ’E called ’imself——”

“The Hubble-Bubble?” I suggested.

Mr. Quelch jumped, more than visibly, and shot a terrified glance around him. “’E’s not here, is he, sir?” he babbled. “’E’s not a friend of yours?”

“Not exactly,” I assured him. “I don’t think you need fear meeting him again.”

The woman stirred uneasily by the fire. “We were made to get into a sort of tin box,” she said wearily. “Mike got in first; but the man pulled him out again by the neck. ‘Ladies first,’ he said, quite polite-like. Then I got in, and I don’t know what happened, but I fell into a puddle of water on my hands and knees. I

thought I must be dreaming, for the room had disappeared and I was all alone in a forest. Then, while I was pinching myself to see if it was real, I heard a flop, and some one screaming, and I looked round to find Mike in the puddle as well. Then a rope came, and an arm came out of the air above the puddle—sort of feeling its way down the rope it was—and then we saw the head and shoulders of the Hubble-Bubble man. They were sticking out of the air, same as if he was hanging out of a window—only we couldn't see the rest. He said if we could find our way back to where England was we might find a young lady called Miss Marjorie. He said, 'I'm afraid you won't do much by yourselves, Miss Watkins, so, as you seem to be the more intelligent of the two, I advise you to find Miss Marjorie as quick as you can. *She's* all right,' he says.

"We were looking for her," she added wistfully. "Do you know anything about her?"

"You have found her home, Miss Watkins," I answered. "I am afraid you are too late, though. She is—she—I have lost her," I said.

The woman began to cry softly. "I told you so," said Quelch. "Always talkin' about finding her," he explained. "Sayin' she had a *feelin'* it would be all right when we found 'er—an' all that sort o' silly rot. You ain't religious, are you, sir?"

"I suppose not, Mr. Quelch."

"Well neither am I. I'm a fairish well read man, as you may 'ave noticed. 'Uxley, Darwin,

'Aeckel—the German Giant—been through most of 'em. A wonderful brain that last! But *she's* just full of notions." He nodded contemptuously at the figure under the deerskins by the fire.

"How did you get here?" I said hastily. My heart was sore again at the mention of Marjorie, and I was far from desirous of listening to the opinions of a type of free-thinker I had hoped to be obsolete.

"We followed the sunset west," spoke up the woman, "and then we went north into the mountains, and then west again until we met the sea. We had an axe and a bit of canvas and a little food at first, but Mike lost the axe over a cliff among the mountains, and the matches he gave us—the Hubble-Bubble I mean—all got used up, so we couldn't make a fire any more. I tried rubbing sticks, but it wouldn't work. The best I got was a little smoke, and I made my fingers sore enough to get that."

"It can be done," I assured her, "but it takes a terrible lot of practice. What did you live on?"

"Roots and things," she answered laconically. "Grubs sometimes; sometimes fish we caught with our hands. Anything we could get."

"We were pretty near starving most of the time," said Quelch bitterly. "Only time I got a square meal was when we found the sheep—caught its horns in a bramble bush it had—an' we killed it with a stone—an' we 'ad to eat *that* raw—— Oh, Lord!"

“There’s wild fruits too—down there,” added the woman.

“An’ bears an’ wolves an’ lions an’ tigers,” said Quelch. “Bright sort o’ time *we* ’ad—but you seem pretty comf’ble ’ere.” He appeared to feel that he had a justifiable grievance.

“*She* kep’ on talkin’ about Miss Marjorie,” he continued, “an’ wondering when we would find ’er. An’ then she’d go prayin’ an’ takin’ all sorts o’ fancies about ’er prayers bein’ answered. Nice ’oles I was led into more’n once following ’er. After we come down from the mountains we ’it the seashore, w’ere there were shellfish an’ things to eat, an’ caves to hide in. I was for stoppin’, but she wouldn’t. Went off following a *star* she did. Always doin’ that sort of thing, even after we ’ad to turn back a dozen times or more.”

“What star did you follow?” I asked.

“There’s one by itself,” said the woman. “There’s seven bright stars like a cup in the sky, and they go swinging round this other one, which don’t move. I’ve noticed it at home before now. It’s a lonely sort of star and I’ve been lonely, too, at times. We just kept on the seashore—because I knew that England must be near the coast somewhere—and the star was a bit ahead and on our right, and the sunset—that’d be west, wouldn’t it—ahead and on our left. Mostly we were by the sea, but when the star swung I moved inland so’s to keep it in the same place. So’s we’d be going straight like—for the star doesn’t move.

"I'd noticed too it was getting higher—though not as high as it used to be in London. I felt as if God hung that star for a sign for me, and I thought when it was as high as it used to be that'd be to show us we were back to England; for everything else was changed."

"No doubt that was one of the reasons for the star," I agreed. "How did you get across the Channel?"

"There was no Channel. Just a great plain of grass with a big river about half way across. The shore went off west, and the star was high. I said to Mike, 'Now we're there. We'll follow it *straight*.' And we did—went right to it—though I was near drowned swimming the river, for there's nothing to eat on the plain and I was very weak like. We went on until we couldn't go any further, and we lay down to die. Mike kept talking about Eckle, and there not being any God, at first; but afterwards he got frightened and wanted to know what we'd better do. 'Pray,' I said. 'Pray to Eckle if you think he knows best,' but he didn't seem very sure about it. So, in the end, he said he thought that maybe I was right after all, and we said our prayers together. Then we went on a bit further—crawling on our hands and knees we were—and then we saw the Cross.

"Mike got very excited. He said it was a miracle and a sign from Heaven that we were to be saved, and that he was sorry he'd been an atheist. Then we went on a bit more,

until I went to sleep and woke up under the tree."

Quelch grinned sheepishly. "I did 'ave a sort o' fancy that Cross o' yours was somethin' supernatural," he said. "Kind o' weak with hunger I was. Didn't rightly know what I was sayin'. I might ha' known some one put it there. 'Ave you ever read 'Aeckel, sir?"

For the first time since I had found her "Adela" showed a flash of spirit. "Eckle," she snorted. "How does Eckle know, any more than you or me?"

"I'm—I'm sorry about Miss Marjorie, sir," she added weakly. "P'raps you'll find her again soon."

"Some time soon, I hope," I answered; but Miss Watkins had fallen asleep.



## CHAPTER XIII

**T**HERE is no essential difference in humanity, be it four or forty years of age. When grief reaches a certain pitch, graduated according to the strength of the sufferer, humanity weeps and will not be comforted—except by a new interest.

In the case of the very young and unspoiled the salve is not hard to find—almost anything will do ; but as year piles on year, and familiarity breeds the inevitable contempt, the child-man is less easily satisfied. A mother robbed by Death of her baby will not be consoled by a stick of chocolate. Chocolate is not the thing of wonder it used to be in the days of the tragic smashing of her beloved doll.

What I mean to indicate, by all this moralising, is that the arrival of Michael Quelch and Adela Watkins at least served to preserve my sanity—they were so curious. They were not interesting enough to make me forget Marjorie altogether—it would take unthinkable things to do that—but their presence made the pain bearable. I found that I could work again, and that I had acquired patience to endure.

I decided that further residence in Limestone Hollow would be bad for me, by reason of its associations, and bad for Quelch by reason of

his lack of enterprise. My idea was to stockade a fair-sized space at the bottom of the ravine, build a new house within the stockade, and reserve Limestone Hollow itself as a sort of citadel where we could safely store our goods, and whither we could retreat in time of danger.

The work before me was heavy. The construction of a wolf-proof stockade to enclose three sides of a five-acre plot, and the building of the new house, would mean the felling and splitting of a number of trees. These had to be dragged to the lake and towed across, and this necessitated the building of another raft. Over and above these jobs, I meant to break ground within the enclosure for a cornfield, kitchen-garden and orchards, and to build cattle pens.

Quelch was far from industrious by nature, but the harrowing experiences through which he had been dragged since August last had somewhat subdued his fiery soul. I suppose this is why he worked at first with a positively indecent fury. He also appeared to be afraid of me for some reason, although I did nothing to frighten him that I can remember. In fact, I seldom spoke at all in those days.

Both he and the girl recovered rapidly from the effects of their recent starvation. At the end of a week they were hardly recognisable—especially in the case of the girl. I was much more attracted by the character of Adela Watkins than by that of Quelch, I may say. She wasn't much to look at when I found her, a thin

slip of a woman with big, pale blue eyes and flaxen hair—both of which contrasted strangely with the deep tan of her face and arms—but she owned a fair supply of rude common sense, and an intuitive knack of knowing things without the necessity for research. On the whole, she was far more suited for the life than Quelch.

We continued living in the kitchen, which I had fixed up so as to be more of an habitation. I meant to burn the house as soon as the new residence below was completed. Up with the flames should go Marjorie's personal belongings, and a chapter of my life—unless—I maintained that “unless.”

By the end of the month I had already sown a patch of the rye stuff and had planted my orchard with crab apple, wild cherry and various other cuttings and seeds—many of them strange to me. Remained only to get the stockade completed before the seeds could germinate and tempt the wandering deer with their succulent shoots.

I found that to do this as originally planned would be beyond my powers. I therefore limited my ideas on the stockade itself to a stout six-foot fence of posts and rough hurdles. This would serve well enough against the deer and would be at least a partial protection against the wintry wolf. For the rest I now proposed to have an inner “V” shaped stockade at the base of the ravine, with the new house at the salient. This ravelin was to be stout enough

and high enough to prevent the passage of any wild animal, and sufficiently advanced to leave a space for the quartering of the prospective herd whereof the white calf—by this time a white heifer—formed the nucleus.

So matters progressed apace. Quelch and Adela Watkins helped me with a will, the latter by reason that she had apparently attained the height of her ambition in reaching Marjorie's country, and the former impelled by his strange dread of my own harmless person. I cannot understand this action on his part at all. He behaved as if I *compelled* him to work the way he did at first, though, God knows, if both he and the girl had packed up and walked off I should have uttered a sigh of relief, dropped my tools and sunk back into utter savagery. Work without hope is a deadly thing.

In the early part of May—this same year, the year Two—the white cattle showed up again on the downs, returning north by the route they had taken on the Autumn migration. I imagine they graze in July and August in the country beyond the north ranges, spending the balance of the year on the northern shores of the Great Bight; that coast where Adela Watkins and Michael Quelch walked months on end with the Pole Star over the same shoulder. In fact, our refugees passed through the herd.

On this occasion the cattle passed us a trifle more to the east than on the first trip, and I had to leave the new log house in the earliest

stages of construction and hurry off with Quelch to intercept them. We had to travel a long way from home to get in touch with the outskirts of the herd, and I was more than a little nervous lest some ferocious cow should manage to do for us both, leaving the unfortunate Adela to fend for herself as sole inhabitant of the known world.

However, luck was with us this time. The beasts were not as vindictive as I imagined them to be, and without much difficulty or risk I shot a couple of cows and a bull and roped three yearling calfs. Then we crept into a hollow where we tethered our captives to bushes until the herd should pass by.

It took five or six days until the last of the slow moving squadrons was out of sight, nor was our sojourn in this gully I am speaking of a pleasant one. The calves bellowed for help uninterruptedly, and we often had to crawl into the thickets to hide whilst their wondering kinfolk gathered round to examine them and snort suspiciously at the thongs which held them.

Thirst, however, exhausted the poor little beasts. Their voices failed and they lay down to die, whereupon their friends callously departed, and Quelch and I crawled forth with sycophantic offerings of water in deerskin buckets. Thus we persuaded them that we were friendlily disposed, and at the end of six days were able to get headstalls on them and lead them off home.

“Quelch,” I remarked, as we staggered along

under loads of dried beef, jerking the hungry calves on their unwilling way, "have you any idea why I am doing all this, Michael Quelch?"

Quelch looked blank.

"Why do you suppose I am building houses, and fencing land, and catching cattle and all that sort of game?"

"Suppose——" began Quelch slowly, then paused. "Well, a man wants to be comfortable like," he added, uneasily.

"Right you are! But a man can't be particularly comfortable alone, can he? Why, when Miss Watkins insisted on going to look for my wife—why did you follow her? Why did you not stop where you were and make yourself comfortable like on the spot? By all accounts you were in good enough country."

To my astonishment Quelch suddenly flushed and then went very pallid. I thought he was ill and jumped to catch him, for he staggered. To my further astonishment he promptly dropped the lead rope, gave a bitter howl and bolted.

I grabbed the rope before the attached calf could escape. When I looked up Quelch was still running. He had dropped his pack and was at full speed ahead for home, dodging like a snipe.

"Don't!" he wailed. "For Gawd's sake, sir, don't you do it!"

"Don't do what, you fool?" I shouted angrily, for my temper had suffered from the heat of the day and the heavy work.

Quelch ran on for another fifty yards before he



came to a halt. He leaped into a thicket, whence he stared out at me like a frightened rabbit.

Apparently my look of utter amazement served to calm his disturbed nerves. We surveyed one another in silence for a few minutes, after which he slunk back nervously to his place.

"I 'ad a sort o'—— It's the 'eat, sir—— It made me sickish like for a minute," he stammered.

"Curious form your illness seemed to take. Do you feel all right again?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Quite better, thank you, sir! Shall I lead one of your animals?"

"I can manage all right," I assured him; but he still appeared unusually anxious to lighten my burden.

"Shall I carry—those arrows of yours are a bit 'eavy, sir," was his next remark. "Shan't I carry them a bit? I'm light loaded, sir—indeed I am."

"Well, thank God for that, and trek," I retorted. "The arrows are all right where they are."

"Yes, sir!" said Quelch meekly, and promptly fell back about fifty yards to the rear, in which strategic position he travelled the rest of the way home.



## CHAPTER XIV

I WAS irritated at the unaccountable conduct of Quelch, so I let him slouch along behind me without attempting further to enlighten him as to my plans. As a matter of fact, I had merely desired to bring it home to him that he now held the proud position of patriarch to this world of ours, and that should anything happen to me—as I rather expected it would—he must consider it his duty to keep the work of civilisation going, raise himself as large a family as might be, and do his utmost to get in touch with those other immigrants of whose possible presence the Hubble-Bubble had spoken.

However, the ass seemed to have interpreted my opening remarks into some subtle threat—why I could not say, though I supposed vaguely it was the break of my customary taciturnity—he had hardly heard the sound of my voice that day since we broke camp at dawn. For the present I let the matter drop.

I helped him to lower the new calves down to the pen in Limestone Hollow, where we proposed to confine them for a month or two until they appeared settled down and had grown used to handling. Then, having nothing more to do at the moment, for it was too late to continue work

on the fencing, I strolled off along the base of the cliff in the gloaming.

I was fighting hard against a return of one of the gloomy suicidal fits which harassed me daily, and against which I could only oppose a blind and unreasoning faith that my wife was not really lost to me.

I should here like to mention the debt I owe to Adela for encouraging me in this illogical attitude towards the hard facts of life, and to warn readers lest they should adopt the tactics of Michael Quelch in similar cases. Quelch conceived it his duty to open my eyes ; whereat I kicked him ; for which I am sorry.

I sat down on the slope which fringed the bottom of the cliff and gazed across the darkling meadow to the lake. "She is not dead—she is not dead—she is not dead!" I found myself repeating, as if constant reiteration could alter the evidence of my senses. My old friend the devil strove hard within me and whispered of the dreary marsh and the gashed muzzle of the hideous lizard brute. "Dead—dead—dead!" he cried, mocking, echoing my last words to the rhythm of the breaking waves which had lapped the abandoned raft.

In my agony the sweat broke out on my forehead, and mechanically I passed my hand over my eyes to brush it away. As if the action had swept my past experiences with it, the lake and forest vanished. I found myself, all amazed, in utter darkness.

I could not think what had happened at first. It was so unexpected and so sudden. Without a warning pang total blindness had fallen like a curtain, and there I sat, wondering greatly but unafraid.

This is a strange thing about repeated and great calamities and disappointments. The horrors which seemed to surround the pathway at the going in fade one by one as one advances. Mysteriously one is lifted up above purely personal suffering, and even death itself—remember I have died, “if you like to put it that way,”—loses its sting. I believed myself struck blind, and the only emotion I could discover in the realisation was a mild wonder.

Strange human mind! I rose to my feet and was instantly struck down again by a violent blow on the head. At once I became afraid, lashed out in retaliation—for I thought myself attacked—and by a perfectly automatic process I became an animal creature fighting for its life. I smote in the direction of the blow, had the machete knocked out of my hand, slipped, and once more fell sprawling.

Then, because I remained alive, it filtered into my mind that I had made some mistake. The blow on my head was merely dealt by an overhanging rock against which I had stumbled.

I sat up cautiously, and felt around me. Shock the second! The grass had given place to some smooth hard surface and then——

When and where before had I heard that pent

whispering of underground waters, rising and falling in the rocky dark?

With an hysterical laugh I fumbled for my flint and whisked a shower of sparks from the steel. My eyesight was as sound as ever it had been. The facts of the case were that I was crouched on the cold metal plates which lined the heading of the Whistling Adit. I could hardly believe it; but some reversal of the Hubble-Bubble's mysterious process had whipped me back whence I originally came a year before.

I squatted in silence for a minute. "If this," I finally decided, "is not a miracle, what is?" I again remembered my confused fever-dream—and stepped forth to search for Marjorie.

Thirty seconds later I stepped into the salt fresh breezes which fanned the tunnel's mouth. Below me heaved the wide Atlantic, and far out to sea a vessel's port light already gleamed red across the gathering dark.

I revolved the situation and it looked perplexing. I could hardly walk into Poltyack as I was—in deerskins and wearing my machete—and coolly announce my return from some vague place along the fourth dimension. Nobody would believe me, and more than likely I would be arrested for complicity in the murder of Crawley and the disappearance of Marjorie.

I was sorely puzzled for a time as to what I ought to do. Finally, I mustered up courage,

with the advance of night, to sneak to the top of the cliff.

I examined the contents of my scrip and found that, besides the little cup I usually carried, and my tinder box—both of solid gold—I had the good fortune to possess the sum of one sovereign, a coin I had carried for luck and in remembrance of the bounty of Aunt Wilhelmina. My hair was reasonably short, and my beard trimmed—facts for which I blessed Marjorie's fastidiousness. If I could only procure a suit of clothes I had the wherewithal to make my way to London, a city where I hoped to ferret out some information as to the whereabouts of the Hubble-Bubble. Having decided that this untoward occurrence had something to do with the search which I instinctively felt I was somehow prosecuting—I cannot explain this matter, but from the day of the fight with the lizard I seemed to be searching, searching, searching, notwithstanding the apparent death of my wife—having decided, I say, that in this direction lay "forward," it seemed to me that our original transportation agent might know something that would assist me in my hunt.

Beyond this I had no desire or emotion. I was "fed up" with wonders, and beyond a feeling of strangeness and unreality—as if I was again dreaming—I never thought twice over the amazing aspect of this latest adventure.

I had more serious problems to trouble my

mind ; and the more I attempted to solve my great outstanding riddle—how to clothe myself without arousing suspicion ?—the more insoluble it seemed to grow.

I thought over various schemes. Stripping and swimming out to sea was one. I might be picked up by a boat and pose as a bather carried away by the tide, or as the remains of a yachting party which had come to an untimely end. I abandoned the idea, however. I did not see my way to accomplish this scheme, retain my gold and at the same time piece together a sufficiently plausible tale. In great agitation I paced the little gulley where once I had encountered Marjorie and my great adventure, and presently I evolved a second plan to go inland and rob a scarecrow.

I had to let this drop also. I remembered that scarecrows were few and far between nowadays, and usually consisted of a defunct rook, *sus per coll.* on the scene of its depredations.

I was almost desperate by the time my stupid head had ferreted out the only feasible, simple and proper method. Glancing hastily round to make sure that I was unobserved, I started at a brisk trot in the direction of Poltyack.

Once I encountered a man, but a year's hunting experience stood me in good stead. I saw him before he observed me. I dropped quietly into the heather, and lay concealed until he was out of sight.

Fortunately the night was dark and cloudy,



and an occasional skiff of rain made it unlikely that many people would be abroad.

Four hours I lay in the heather above the village, until the lights had one by one gone out. I passed the time in fervent prayers that the same "boots" might still uphold his job at the *Trevelyan Arms*. My reasons for this altruistic devotion were as follows :

The "boots" did not live in the hotel, but inhabited a cottage of his own a few doors up the street. His custom was to go out by the back door, leaving the key concealed in a crevice of the quarried wall that ran round the back of the inn. I presume that until my advent, on this occasion, robbery was unknown in Poltyack, for every soul in the village knew about that key.

Half an hour after the last of the lights had been extinguished I crept by stealth to the back door and felt in the niche. The "Boots" had not lost his job, nor changed his habits in the interval. I rejoiced.

"What a shock for them if I get caught," I thought, as I groped my way past the silent bar to the foot of the stairs. The mental picture of fat Brother Host confronting a skin clad savage, with a hay fork, almost tricked me into open laughter. I gripped my quivering jaws with one hand, pouched a handful of matches, and slid stealthily up the stair.

A door in the upper corridor opened gently, and in at the crack went the tousled head of



the prehistoric raider. I was listening breathlessly for sounds of human breathing—for it was my own room I was bent on burgling.

Never a sound! A mouse ran across the floor before me, but of the two of us he made the greater noise. I had reached the cupboard and was fumbling disgustedly round the bare hooks. At least some one might have left an odd garment.

My luck seemed to have failed me, for the hooks were bare, but, just as I was giving up, my toe encountered yielding leather. I clutched upon the prey and found it was a Gladstone bag.

“But whose?” I wondered, not daring to answer the question. My heart was throbbing with wild hope, for the bag was full of garments and of far too good a quality of pigskin to belong to any Poltyack fisherman. I dared not think—I——

“By Jupiter!” I said, “This is more than I can abide and live. I’ve got to strike a light.”

I did. I pulled down the blind first, and drew across the heavy curtains lest the smallest ray should percolate to warn honest folks that felony walked abroad in the night. Then I lit my match with trembling, sweat-damped fingers; and then my joy was complete.

“J. Thorpe!” in bold black letters. That surely was the second miracle that day, wrought by that star shifting God who set the face of lost Adela Watkins to Polaris. Far swifter than I had entered I sped out again by the back

door, and bolted up the cliff path with my precious bag clasped to my bosom.

“If only Marjorie were with me,” I thought sorrowfully, “what fun!” The thought made me heavy hearted again, and I crept back to the adit less cheerfully than I had gone forth.

## CHAPTER XV

**I**T is my desire to pass swiftly over my further adventures in search of the Hubble-Bubble, so I crave leave to skip the next two weeks, at the end of which period I may be discovered on one of the benches in St. James's Park. That I was going to find my man I had little doubt. Indeed I had him, as I thought, located, and was only waiting his return to town—but all the same it looked rather like starvation if he didn't come pretty quickly. The jeweller in Penzance to whom I sold my golden vessel and my tinder box was a robber. Further, I imagine, he put me in the same category; for he remarked, with a sneer, that the workmanship was pretty crude even for the alleged producers—the West African “Natives” to wit.

He seemed so suspicious that at last I took the price he offered just to get clear of him. My flask and my case of razors I had pawned a week ago, in Wardour Street, my bag was sold, and for twenty-four hours I had lived on hope and free drinks of water provided at the expense of the London County Council.

I scanned the passers-by, and wondered to think of all the strange events I had been through, and my own lack of business instincts to get in such low water in two weeks' time. In the light

of what I now knew, by actual experience, even the most ordinary things became extraordinary. I watched two guardsmen, twin red-coated miracles, in pursuit of a miraculous girl, and I thought of the wild pigs rooting in the forests—perhaps under their very noses, and wondered what the effect would be if all these people suddenly had their eyes opened to the myriad unseen marvels which penned them in. I also wondered how I would feel, if some one gave me something to eat.

I had searched the files of the newspapers for the past year, and found that Crawley's body had never been recovered. Fleet Street had hummed with theories, but the big-wigs finally concluded that it was a case of two lovers agreeing to commit suicide together. Marjorie's handkerchief, caught in a bush half way down a vertical drop of three hundred feet—Hell's Gate they call it, I believe—was accepted as conclusive. My own case was somewhat different. Some bright genius on a sixpenny weekly had made the welkin ring with raucous cries to the effect that I was at the bottom of the whole affair. "Where is John Thorpe?" he demanded. "Is it not a fact that there was some previous attachment between Miss Matthews and this man? To the student of criminology such a case presents few difficulties. Thorpe—a desperate man—goes down to Cornwall. Unexpectedly he meets the lovers on the cliffs. Nobody is around, for the day is dark and inclement. Captain Crawley,

perhaps, is surprised, and tripped to his doom before he is aware of the assassin's intent. Thorpe next seizes the girl"—Oh, Marjorie! Marjorie! if you only were within seizing distance—"and over the ensuing scene of horror and criminal fury we must fain draw a decent veil."

This was rather spoiled, however, by a letter to the *Times* from Buenos Ayres. It was a convincing letter. It breathed sorrow and unutterable grief in every sentence. It stated that the writer was unaware, up till now, of the terrible fate of his old love. And it was signed, J. Thorpe. Experts pronounced the signature genuine, but I leave you to imagine who wrote it.

The Sixpenny Editor cried "Pish!" The Sixpenny Editor cried "Tush!" The Sixpenny Editor exclaimed "Bah!" but a large hearted public wept to think John Thorpe innocent, and his name was cleared. Provided he could invent a sufficiently plausible tale of travel in foreign lands there was nothing to prevent him walking into the offices of Marjorie's lawyer, and permitting the latter to break the news "to his advantage," which he yet advertised. It was five thousand pounds, according to the papers—silly old girl!—but I feared public notice might hamper my search, and refused to disclose my identity. I preferred to lie low and await the Hubble-Bubble.

Quelch and Adela Watkins had failed to achieve fame.

There was one small paragraph about them;

but with Russia and Austria at one another's throats, and the first shots exchanged across the Franco-German frontier, the good people of *the* world had other matters to interest them apart from the vanishment of Quelch. I laughed again—with a tinge of bitterness—as I ruminated upon the strange barriers that hedge our intelligence. If they could only know the few extra truths so strangely disclosed to myself.

And then, with a sort of shocked surprise, I understood how foreign everything had become to me. These people among whom I had passed twenty-six out of my total twenty-seven years of existence were to me hardly more than a dream. I felt like a wandered spirit—a strangely homesick one—marvelling at the manifestation of life before me, but yet a thing apart. I felt no sense of kinship, and I was quite prepared for anything to happen in this most extraordinary world.

And so it was less than surprising when the Hubble-Bubble himself came strolling placidly along the walk.

He was neatly dressed in a blue serge, like my own, and a bowler; and he had accentuated his bird-like neck by donning an old-fashioned turn-down collar. He walked slowly with a long, sagging stride, as if his spindle shanks were hardly equal to the task of supporting his meagre trunk.

I waited until he drew abreast of me, and then, "Good morning, Sir James," I said briskly.

I expected him, at the least, to exhibit some surprise, but not a bit of him! He continued blandly on his solemn way, his dark eyes fixed on vacancy and his lips moving in a dumb monologue.

"Sir James Tetheringham!" I repeated.  
"Sir James, a word with you!"

The Hubble-Bubble wheeled abruptly on me. "I am not——" he began, and then his jaw dropped. "God bless my soul!" he cried devoutly. "How in heaven's name——?"

He peered closer. "You have a beard," he muttered, "and you are undoubtedly very sun-burned, but that one would expect. You are——er——you damned scoundrel!" he exploded. "What are you doing here?"

I was a bit taken aback by his effrontery. "Better not shout quite so loud, Sir James," I advised him. "Remember poor Crawley."

"What the devil do you mean by calling me Sir James all the time?" snarled the Hubble-Bubble. "I am not Sir James Tetheringham, and I cannot for the life of me imagine what put such an idea into your thick head—— Where is Miss Marjorie?"

"That's what *I* want to know?" I cried. His query came as a terrible shock to me, for I had firmly convinced myself that he was going to show me the way to regain her. I don't know why I entertained such an idea, but I was all at sea with what I had gone through, and it seemed he might know. "I am looking for her now," I



said, lamely enough. "Do you not know where she is?"

"How should I? She is alive, but beyond that I know nothing."

"How do you know *that*, then?" I cried. The ground was rocking under my feet, and great blurred clouds danced across the field of view. I almost loved the Hubble-Bubble in that moment.

He passed his hand wearily across his head. "My brain!" he said. "I am—you know what I am. It is *that* which tells me an occasional abstruse truth in a peck of abstruse foolishness. She is a good girl, and you should not have left her."

"I think I will sit down again," I said weakly; and then the clouds blurred all over everything, and a dark veil dropped suddenly.

I came to myself on my back on the path. A policeman and a keeper were holding back the crowd from thronging me, and the Hubble-Bubble was offering me a nip of brandy. "It is all right," he exclaimed testily. "Kindly disperse, and some one call a taxi. My friend is subject to these fits."

I heard the crushing of feet on the ground as two or three bystanders dashed off to compete for the honour of bringing the cab. It arrived, and I was escorted in state to the door, the Hubble-Bubble and a policeman supporting me—quite unnecessarily—on either side.

"Number 10b, Queen Street, Mayfair," he

ordered; and I saw him slip a coin into the constable's hand, which hand thereupon closed firmly and jerked convulsively to the man's helmet. "Don't talk," he advised. "I am taking you home with me, and you can tell me all about it when you are rested and fed. I perceive you have been having a roughish time." We whirled off along the Mall, shot up by St. James's Palace, and now we were crossing Piccadilly—a sunlit glimpse of strange looking crowds, men in unnatural clothes, and women with wholly unnatural complexions. It was as if a great voice shouted sharply in my ear a harsh disapproval of my conduct in adventuring into this alien world.

"But I never asked to come back," I muttered. I had a habit of thinking aloud in those days.

"Don't talk!" said the Hubble-Bubble sternly; though I knew he was aching to ask questions himself.

We drew up in quiet Queen Street near the upper end. The Hubble-Bubble glanced nervously up and down the pavement as he descended. I remember his actions, and a passing impression on guilty consciences which flashed into my mind. He fumbled for his purse and then for his latch-key, finding great difficulty in discovering either. Then two men turned the corner and came strolling up the side-walk. They had not the appearance of Scotland Yard officials, but their advent drove the Hubble-Bubble into a regular

flurry. He ran up the steps and tried to insert his key upside down into the latch. Failing in this he skipped back again, hauled me out of the cab, paid the driver the registered fare three times in quick succession and sternly bade him begone with a thrust of his umbrella which nearly poked the poor man's eye out. The driver opened his mouth to speak, but—having thought to the triple fare—evidently thought better of it, and drove off finally with a curious rapt expression blended of innumerable strong and conflicting emotions. The Hubble-Bubble cursed, dropped his umbrella into the area, and glared at the advancing pedestrians with such lunatic fury that I began to fear an open outburst of sheer madness, arrest, and the forestalling of all my hopes.

“Pressmen!” snarled the Hubble-Bubble. “For heaven's sake help me to get this infernal door open!”

I took the key away from him and opened the door. The alleged pressmen were by this time entering the next house in the row, so I could not see why the Hubble-Bubble's agitation was so profound. Struck by a happy thought I smiled faintly, but with infinite meaning, and glanced at my companion. One of the pair merely gaped, but the shorter, and sharper looking man, returned the smile. They thought he was drunk.

“I *know* they are pressmen,” repeated the Hubble-Bubble, sinking into an arm-chair in the

room into which he now led me. "What a narrow escape—eh?"

"One false move, and our photographs would have been in all the illustrated papers," he continued. "The infamous scoundrels! There is no privacy in the world, and I am but a poor Hubble-Bubble."

He slid from the chair to the floor, and began to soothe his ruffled nerves by the thumb-sucking process I had before witnessed in the cave. I sat down and waited until he had finished.

Presently he appeared to calm down again, and his tone became more rational. He asked me what had put it into my head that he was Sir James Tetheringham, and I explained how I had deduced it from the movements of that distinguished, if eccentric, physicist during the past year.

"Curious!" said the Hubble-Bubble. "And I have to thank you for a happy suggestion. In future I shall endeavour to perform my little experiments in that man's vicinity. I am quite willing that he should get the credit for them, if any inopportune facts come to light."

I began to feel sorry that I had spoken.

"But come," he continued, "you must tell me how you got back; and I will see if we can come to some arrangement. Have you lunched yet?"

I said I had not lunched, whereat he bustled to a cupboard at the back of his sombre little smoking-room—there was absolutely no furniture

except a table, three chairs and a big bookcase—and produced beer in bottles, a ham and a tin of water biscuits. I imagine his ideas on food never soared above this extraordinary diet.

“It is a sort of backlash,” he explained, as I fell on the food—too hungry to be nicely punctilious as to accepting the hospitality of a murderer—“I have seen it happen before, but thought I had solved the problem of preventing it. Careless of me not to remove the plates—*that* would have made matters quite secure—but you see I imagined I might want to use the place again.”

“What for?” I asked.

“Oh, nothing much!” He wriggled uneasily. “You see you must not take all my statements as absolute. I seldom remain of the same mind for five minutes on end. I *might* decide to go back some dark night—see how you are getting on—— Never hoped to lay hands on such a hopeful subject as Miss Marjorie—and—and—fact of the matter is, John Thorpe, she’s not unlike my own girl——”

“Your what?” I exclaimed. This was amazing. The Hubble-Bubble had a girl!

“That’s why I shot what’s his name,” he explained. “He made me angry. He’s rather like the fellow who—er—married my girl—er—no—didn’t shoot *him* yet.”

Here was a coil! My obvious duty was to hand this man over to the police; and he had laid light fingers on the tenderest chords of my

being. My soul sang in response, even as his sensitised plates sang back to his adored violin—he played beautifully—so what could I do? Poor, poor devil!

An idea struck me. “Is Crawley alive, after all?” I asked.

“Oh, yes,” said the Hubble-Bubble.

“And my wife?”

“Likewise.”

“Are they together?” I was suffering sincere, if unromantic, twinges around the solar plexus.

“No,” said the Hubble-Bubble, after a pause; and I breathed again. “When I say your girl is alive, I am not quibbling. She is alive to you, whereas Crawley is dead to you. Both, however, continue existing.”

“How do you know all this?” I asked him.

“My brain,” he said almost complacently. “All that you have told me points most uncompromisingly in one direction; but I have methods of my own of finding the truth. It was against reason, was it not? that Quelch and that Watkins girl should find you like they did. Consider the difficulties!”

“You reason like a madman!” I said angrily.

“I *am* mad,” smiled the Hubble-Bubble.

“Well, I’m not,” I assured him. “You can take it I want something more definite than vague generalities. Kindly remember I hold your life in my hands.” I was angry with him for his calm unreasonableness, though, poor



fellow, it was hardly fair to blame him for actions inspired by the tortured brain of a lunatic.

"There are two people with whom you are dealing at the moment," said the Hubble-Bubble softly. "One is a little fellow who screams in the night and beats his head on the rocks crying, 'How long, O Lord, how long?'——"

"I have a friend that is very like him," I exclaimed dryly. What a knack this Hubble-Bubble had of talking direct to the centre of one's being!

"The other fellow," he continued, "holds Number One down with one hand, the while"—his thin lips twisted whimsically—"his other hand occupies the attention of both the John Thorpes. For a *sane* man you are singularly forgetful!"

I was. I had forgotten his infernal pistol, and I—or perhaps J. Thorpe Number One—broke into a cold sweat as I inspected the familiar muzzle at a point blank range of two yards.

"If you are going to be unpleasant," he continued, "I think you had better go and join your boulder friend Crawley. No man in the world has greater facilities for covering the traces of a casual murder than I have at the moment."

"Am I not right?" he repeated imperiously. I strove to say something, but my tongue failed me. Harassed and perplexed by renewed doubts as to Marjorie's whereabouts I had not the heart to protest. I—or perhaps J. Thorpe Number *Two*—nodded, and raised vague eyes to meet



hers in that unknown land where I am confident we shall one day find ourselves, Marjorie and I, and where we will no longer be bothered by stupid fears of losing one another.

The Hubble-Bubble lowered his revolver.

"You see I have spared your life," he said. "Don't talk about taking mine. At the moment I value it."

And, rightly or wrongly, I never thought again about denouncing him to the authorities.

## CHAPTER XVI

**M**Y new ally was not long in unfolding a proposition which, whilst leaving much to be desired, was more definite than any I had hoped for.

For five days I remained in his house, whilst he returned to Cornwall alone. Before he left he coolly unlocked a large iron despatch box, which stood in the corner of his smoking-room, hauled out a fistful of notes and gold, and threw them on the table. "You go off and amuse yourself with that," he said. "I'll be back in a week, and I'll let you know the results of my investigations when I return. Remember—mum's the word!"

I thanked him for his generosity, which I did not take advantage of in quite the same way as he had probably intended. I found that the house which he had placed at my disposal in his absence was well stocked with every kind of reference book, and I rejoiced accordingly. Having a fair amount of experience in the stenographic art, I contrived to copy out a good deal of badly needed information before he got back to Queen Street. Not as much as I had hoped to carry away, I must confess, but still enough to lay the foundations of most of the arts and crafts subsequently practised in Marjorieland.

I also contrived to sew a number of leather pockets inside my shirt, and these I filled with such purchases as might be most useful to us. I got my razors out of pawn, and I bought a variety of garden seeds, some cutlery, and a few yards of the finest silk procurable. My brief stay in London was no pleasure trip.

On the fifth day he returned unexpectedly, and almost caught me at my clandestine labours.

"You look drawn," he said. "You have been worrying! I told you not to do so."

"It's want of sleep," I answered, truthfully enough. I had been at it night and day since his departure.

"Well," said the Hubble-Bubble, "you are a very great fool. I knew I was in the right all along; and now you must come with me to Poltyack."

Beyond that I could get no information out of him—he said I might trust him, or go to the devil, whichever I choose—so, as the cab was actually waiting at the door, I ran to my bedroom, thrust my purchases into a handbag, and joined him.

He remained silent until the train was steaming out of Victoria Station. Then he remarked, sulkily, that I need not think I was going to take that bag with me. I fobbed him off with a downright lie to the effect that it only contained a little light lunch, so that I might be saved the necessity of entering refreshment rooms where I might be recognised.

To my relief he did not press the matter, and when I left the train at Truro I was still in possession of my treasures. He had alighted several stations back, proceeding direct to the *Trevelyan Arms*—which he had openly made his headquarters—but I was to tramp it across country to the trysting-place, arriving after nightfall. As he had now informed me that my destination was Marjorieland—more he would not say—I felt rather pleased at my foresight. I walked on out of town, and under cover of a hedge I unpacked my bag and stored the contents in my secret pouches. The bag itself I hove down an abandoned shaft.

My heart was light, for the Hubble-Bubble's vague assurances had comforted me not a little. I strode along whistling, and tried to picture the surrounding country as it had been before the hand of man was set upon it. It seemed to me that of the two places Marjorieland was the preferable. I doubt that Cornwall was ever much more than a heathery waste.

I have often been puzzled by this discrepancy between our own and the Old World. There is an unmistakable similarity in the arrangement of land and water; for instance the Great Bight, up the shore of which came Quelch and Adela, is not so very far north of the proper place for the Mediterranean—that is in the easternmost part of it; and I have further christened the big river which runs out through the plains the Seine. I chose this name because the upper reaches of

our river—where the course twists southwards—are very close indeed to the geographical position of a smaller River Seine in France. But this resemblance is only partial. Marjorieland has limestone formations where Cornwall is all slate and granite—although there are slate rocks in the eastern range—and south-western Europe seems to be represented by water over the larger part of it. The south shore of the Great Bight is a trifle north—say a few hundred miles—of the Old World African coast. It is all very perplexing.

However, I did not vex myself with speculations on this subject as I walked northwards from Truro in the warm Spring evening. I whistled, and eke I almost danced, until I found casual passers-by began to eye me with distrustfulness. Then I thought fit to adopt a more sober demeanour, and regretted a foolhardy shave at a Truro barber's. Supposing I were recognised.

Nobody seemed to know me, however, and again I waxed over-confident. I passed a house with a lawn, where an old gentleman was practising archery. He shot very badly, to my way of thinking, and I challenged him across the hedge.

"Sir!" I cried, and fluttered one of Hubble-Bubble's fivers, "I'll bet you that I can lick your best score." He was justifiably astonished, and came down to the hedge peering at me under his bushy brows.

“Eh?” he said. “What’s that? Who the devil are you, sir?”

“The devil, perhaps,” I answered gaily. “Be it enough to know I take an interest in your noble and ancient pastime. Five guineas to your bow I’ll put up the best score out of six shots apiece!”

“I admire your cheek,” said the ancient man. “Let’s see what you can do?”

He grumbled sore at the result; for I shot with heart and soul for the credit of Queen Marjorie, and I insisted on the terms of the wager. His bow was lamentably weak, yet I thought it would do for a pattern to copy.

I left him shaking his head over the prevalence of lunacy in the West Country, and walked on as the sun began to set.

When the bees had left the heather and the sunset was only a faint glow on the western horizon, I struck the sea coast and turned eastward until a lanky figure arose from behind a gorse bush and barred my way.

“What’s that stick thing you’ve got in your hand?” inquired the voice of the Hubble-Bubble.

“Only a bow. I won it in a competition.”

“You fool!” he snarled. “Do you want to have the whole country interested in your movements. Throw it over the cliff at once. You’ve shaved yourself too, I perceive. You utter fool!”

“Well, what difference does it make?” I

asked. "They may look for me as much as they please, but they won't find me—what?"

My answer seemed to tickle his vanity. His "colonising" project was a tender spot. "I've been worried to death by a party of trippers," he remarked. "They hung about the Whistling Adit all the afternoon, until I had almost decided to chance it and to deal with them according to their merits."

I became grave again. It was hard to remember that this man did not stick at murder even to further his ends; but I was at his mercy if I intended to continue my search for Marjorie under his guidance. I suggested that we had better be going if he meant to carry out his purpose before we were observed.

I had some trouble about the bow, and more when he suggested that I should strip before entering the chamber; but in the end we compromised. I removed my coat, waistcoat and socks, retaining the weapon as compensation for my lost machete. Hoping he would not notice my bulging shirt, I cast my garments through the gate and waited.

"Remember," he said, as his wheel whirled round. "Remember this is the last time. You can sit in the same place until you are sick—it's a wonder to me how you blundered on it the second time—but you won't get back. I'm going to remove the plates after you are gone."

"Right you are!" I cried. "But have you



no more to tell me about Marjorie before we part ? ”

“Go and find out,” said the Hubble-Bubble, and lifted his fiddle to his chin. I waited for the note and crept trembling into the chamber.

. . . . .

I find it impossible to depict the sensation of traversing the fourth dimension, for there is none in a physical sense. It sounds rather lame to say, “I got inside a metal box and the Hubble-Bubble pressed a button, and then I found myself at the bottom of the cliff in the dark,” but that is all that occurred. I admit a thousand indescribable emotions, which, being so, must remain undescribed. What more do you want ?

I rose from the bank and walked out into the meadow. My brief visit to England had become a thing of the past, a dream almost, for I had walked in a dream most of the time, and I never could convince myself that sights which should have been familiar were other than strange manifestations of some outer world. My experiences had somehow turned my comprehension of matters upside down, and in that attitude they stuck. Now, however, I was home in Marjorie-land, and everything was real enough. I rolled over on the turf and kissed the ground in my delight.

But I had graver matters to consider, and the thought of my return to Limestone Hollow sent a wave of distress across my jubilation. Despite

the hopeful words of my murderous benefactor I thought of the lonely house, and for a minute it seemed there was no peace for me in Earth or Heaven.

Then I mastered my failing heart and walked grimly out towards the lake.

I could now see the Hollow itself, and my first glance assured me that Quelch and Adela Watkins were still in possession. A fire was burning where the forge should have been, and I could see a figure moving to and fro. Presently arose the clack of a hammer, and I knew that Quelch was trying his 'prentice hand at smithing. I was pleased to find him so industrious, and I thought it rather strange. Perhaps Miss Watkins had bullied him into some small show of enterprise.

Then I stood in stony astonishment. I opened my jaws to shout, but the yell of surprised recognition died in my throat. A large dark object had passed before the fire and was stubbornly resisting the efforts of Quelch to kick it out of the way. The view was partly obscured by the edge of the ledge, and I jumped into the air several times in my frantic efforts to get a better sight of the little comedy above. Surely there could be no possibility of mistaking that barrel-like form; and the strange, unpleasing trick of rolling over, paws uppermost, when the bulky obstruction that owned it was urgently desired to move out of the path of busy people! I found my voice again, and my loud holloa of recogni-

tion brought Quelch running to the brink of the precipice.

I went over the new fence with one hand on the top rail, and I nearly broke a leg over one of the logs for the unfinished house. I wonder I did not break my neck in the mad scramble up the ravine. Quelch had run out along the ledge, and was staring out into the dark.

“’Oo’s there ?” he called.

“Me—Thorpe, you juggins ! Is she safe ?”

“W’y, Mr. Thorpe, sir,” said Quelch, and I noted an unaccountable disappointment in his utterance, “W’y, Mr. Thorpe, w’ere *’ave* you been ? I’d give you up for dead.”

I brushed past him and seized the bear by the shaggy jowls. “Tommy,” I said, “Where’s Missus ?”

“Here,” chuckled a soft voice in the dark, and I was pinioned from behind. “Gently ! Gently !” said Marjorie.

## CHAPTER XVII

**I**N all the annals of Limestone Hollow never was such a night as this. It seemed impossible almost that Marjorie should sit before me in the living flesh—pigtail and all—twirling her bare toes on the bearskin. I half expected her to vanish the moment I took my eyes off her, and consequently I feared to do so. Indeed, before we had been together again for the space of ten minutes, I had succeeded in making her angry. She gritted her little teeth with fury, because I would not, or could not, drop my eyes from her face.

“If you hadn’t been a born idiot,” she remarked, “you could have found me ages ago.” This is Marjorie all over. She has about as much sentiment as one might expect to find in a public executioner. I pocket the insult. “Where have you been ?” I asked.

“On an island,” said my wife. “Where else could I be ?” She started suddenly and picked up the lamp. “What have you been doing to your head ?” she asked sharply, and drew it down for closer examination.

I explained how I had met the plesiosaurus in the swamp, and how I, naturally, imagined her dead. I think it was more the fever than anything else, however, that had greyed my hair ;

I had noticed it in London, so it was no surprise to me. "It might have been worse, Marjorie," I said. "If my hair had been fine instead of coarse I should have gone bald instead—so they tell me."

But Marjorie did not seem to see anything funny in it at the moment. I didn't give a hang whether my hair chose to fall out *en bloc* or turn sky-blue for that matter; but I cannot help gloating—old man as I am—over this fortunate chance which really brought it home to her high flightiness exactly how valuable she was—to me.

"Poor old Jack!" she said presently. "I didn't know it was half as bad as that"—of course she didn't, no girl does—"but how funny you should run across the what-d'ye-call-it too."

"The plesiosaurus?"

"The pleasant saurus. Dee'd unpleasant beast, I call it."

"It did attack you, then?" I cried.

"Of course it did. It bit Thomas a horrible bite on the tail, and muvver's boy cried, didn't you, darling?"

"Begin at the beginning," I ordered, secure in the dignity of my frosty poll. "Never mind Tommy; he's asleep."

"Well, we went out on the raft," said Marjorie, "and—and we were angry. I didn't mean to be angry, Jack. I wasn't well—I—Oh, Jack—I've something else to tell you too!"

"Marjorie!"

"Imphm!" said my wife, smiling a little. Immediately my manly victory was turned into disastrous rout. I grovelled at her feet. You would had you been in my place. Remember it was mainly my fault that she had lost herself.

Marjorie kept on smiling. I imagine she was inwardly rejoicing at having drawn me further into her toils. She dropped her head on my shoulder and the smile developed into a chuckle. Then she peered upwards and laughed, in open triumph, in my face.

"Go on with your story," I said, as severely as I could. "You're a naughty girl."

"I'm a very *clever* girl. What part was I at? Oh, yes! We drifted down the river."

"What were you doing in the river?" I asked. "You never told me how you got there."

"I went to see if I could manage the raft in the current," said Marjorie, "and I couldn't. I *yelled* for you; but you didn't hear—or else you were too angry to come."

The idea of my anger holding me back from helping Marjorie in distress was almost too much to bear. "Please, Marjorie! It's not cricket to kick a man when he's down. I only went to look for you at one o'clock, and you were out of sight by then."

"Of course I was, poor old grey-head. We could have landed at one or two places we passed, but—but I wanted to annoy you as much as possible, so I went on down to the sea, and I suppose I went too far. There's an awful current. I was

sorry for what I'd done then, but it was *too* late. we went *miles* out to sea," continued Marjorie, and the waves slopped over the raft until I thought we were going to be drowned. We *whined*."

"Who whined?"

"Thomas did at first, and then both of us together. Thomas hates being drowned. Then when all hope had been abandoned we saw land on the starboard bow—or wherever it is you see land—and the waves were not so bad. I found I could work the oar enough to row against the current, and then, just when we were getting near the shore, the pleasant saurus came—and it bit Thomas."

"Where did it come from?" I asked. Marjorie gulped once and proceeded.

"Search me!" Marjorie had studied American in the days of her youth. "It came and it bit, and Thomas gave a fearful cry—for the pleasant saurus had him by the tail—and he held on to the raft with his remaining legs."

"What? Did he lose any of 'em?"

"Don't be stupid," complained Marjorie. "His other legs were in the air. He couldn't hold on with *them*. When I looked round, on hearing Thomas let his first yell, I found him sort of standing on his head, and the pleasant saurus holding him up by the tail, and Thomas *shrieking* for help. So I hit the pleasant saurus——"

"On the nose——"

"With the machete. How did you know? Oh! I suppose you saw the cut. The pleasant



saurus dropped Thomas and swam round in a circle, and we hurried on shore——”

“I should think you would!” I broke in.

“But before we got there Thomas bled spots of blood all over the raft, and shuffled about trying to lick his poor tail until it was over everything. That would be the blood you saw.”

“How did you come to lose the raft again?” I asked abruptly.

“You don’t suppose I’d wait to tie it up with that horrible beast after me, do you? We both ran away up the beach, and the pleasant saurus was pleased to try and swallow the painter. He went on playing with it, like a big water newt after a worm, until he had dragged the raft right out to sea again. I threw stones, but it was no use. I think the current must have changed with the tide; for they both went back up the coast the way we had come. I followed it along the shore, but it got further and further away until it was out of sight. I could just see the pleasant saurus’ head waving above the water like a little cormorant in the distance, and then I found myself at the north-eastern end of the island.

“I tried not to cry, Jack,” said Marjorie, “but I—it was no use—it——” her lip began to tremble, and without further ceremony she proceeded to give me a sample of what she could do in that line. This is rather unusual conduct in Marjorie.

“You’re a comfort in some ways, Jack,” said

Marjorie presently. "If *you* began to weep I'd shriek with laughter." With another of her rapid changes she rippled into triumphant mirth, and I knew she had discovered a further weak point in my armour. But I have jingled my chains often enough.

The rest of her story was soon told. Since the day I had fought the plesiosaurus by the swamp she had lived on the island. She was within ten miles of me at the time, on the point of land which I had mistaken for a promontory; but she subsequently removed to a place further west, where the coast approached closer to the mainland. I had actually seen her campfire at night, but was too stupid to recognise it for what it was, although in this instance I can justly claim that the fever I was in caused me to see fires all along the shore. Finally, after a miserable month on a not very hospitable shore my poor little wife had succeeded in building another raft large enough and seaworthy enough to cross the four miles of intervening water. Then she had trudged home to find me gone.

"I didn't think you were dead, somehow," concluded Marjorie, "although that man Quelch insisted you must be. Adela said she saw you sitting by the cliff and ten minutes later, when she looked again, you had vanished. A few days ago I decided you had got back to Cornwall, so your story was not such a surprise as it might have been. I'm going to have the big clasp knife and the silk. How did you get back here?"

"The way I went," I explained. "I found the Hubble-Bubble."

"Why didn't you stay there?" snapped Marjorie, and a queer, almost hard, eagerness crept into her grey eyes. The lamp wick guttered and flickered, and her white face seemed to dance for a moment before me. "Why didn't you stay?" she demanded harshly.

"You'll laugh," I said, and I felt myself blushing; but Marjorie didn't seem in the mood for laughter. "It was a dream," I explained lamely. "I didn't think you could be really dead, somehow; and, besides, if you were, it was here we had our fun together. I was going to wait here until I found you again. Besides, there was nothing there for me——"

"My will!"

"Oh, yes! But you shouldn't have done that, in the first instance; and secondly, the money would be no use here——"

"I'm not talking about *here*," insisted Marjorie. "I'm talking about *there*."

I shrugged my shoulders. "I give it up!" I remonstrated. "You're too deep for me. I brought all the stuff I could carry, which I paid for with the Hubble-Bubble's money, if that's what you mean. My dear girl, if I'd delayed myself by fussing over the propriety of using that fellow's cash instead of yours I might have had the deuce of a job getting back. Supposing you had come home in the meantime—as you did—and found me gone!"

Perhaps the excitement of the last few weeks had been too much for Marjorie, or perhaps it was because my hair had turned grey. I cannot otherwise explain her conduct on this occasion. In the preceding paragraph I have set down, verbatim, all I actually said on this occasion. Yet for some reason she now chose to throw her arms round my neck and make most violent love to me—I can use no other expression for it. I am sorry to give her away, but she did. I remember the event with satisfaction.

## CHAPTER XVIII

SO, after all the fuss and worry, I was safely home again, with Marjorie on deck to see that things were done properly ; indeed the hand of authority fell grievously upon us, and I sometimes wonder Quelch didn't desert. I had brought back with me slips of apple, pear, cherry and plum—all filched from Cornish orchards. Added to this we already had wild raspberries, strawberries, crab-apple, wild cherry and sloes in the forest, and the blackberries were more than plentiful. Wheat I had brought, and oats and barley. Our first crop, indeed, was not likely to yield more than enough for next year's sowing, but we had the rye already planted to go on with, and I had a whole pound of peas—besides other vegetables—which with the potatoes, I figured, would allow us to sample our first year's crop and yet have enough over for re-sowing.

Barring severe droughts—which I did not anticipate—we were sure of a liberal supply of all cereals, and a good many other things beside, within the next few years.

The rest of the things I had brought were more in the nature of luxuries—like the silk—or temporary conveniences : a small saw-blade, knives,

two pairs of scissors, my razors and so forth. But most important of all was my shorthand monograph on "How to do Everything," cribbed from the reference books in the Hubble-Bubble's library. From the information contained in this notable treatise, as I have said before, most of the arts and crafts practised in Marjorieland take their origin.

Of course we had to work like fury—all four of us—to get the fencing completed. We could not afford to risk letting the deer trifle with our first crop. On several occasions I was hardly able to crawl up the ravine to the house, when the failing daylight made further work impossible, and Quelch—well, I am sorry to say that Marjorie reduced the worthy Michael to a temporary condition of slavery. It was absolutely indefensible morally, and a brutal setting at naught of Quelch's political views—for he was an extreme Socialist in his former life, so he claimed—but Marjorie maintained that her necessity knew no law. And so—"Quelch," she said, the first time he showed symptoms of shirking, "if I catch you at that again I will make Mr. Thorpe take you back where he found you, and leave you there *as* he found you. *Do you understand?*"

Quelch—poor devil—understood.

Besides the field work I also built a Catalan forge about this time, and I made some really superior iron, and some rather indifferent steel which I found great difficulty in tempering at first—so great is the chasm between the des-

cribed process and the accomplished act. And we completed the Quelchian domicile also, before I had to drive Marjorie off the heavier tasks.

She has no sense in some important matters. It was only by reminding her of what had happened when she wanted to go and hunt wolves that I was able to make her see my point. What happened when she wanted to hunt wolves? Well, that is another of our secrets.

One way and another, I began to fear that each recurring summer was to mean more arduous toil than its predecessor; until in the end I should perish miserably from overwork. But in the meantime, although I felt sure I was dying from sheer fatigue, I only seemed to wax stronger in body, and Marjorie complained that my meals were a revelation in human piggishness.

It was the day that Quelch and I slew the old sow in the forest—and adopted her family—that the matter of Adela Watkins first came up. I mention it because it caused me no little uneasiness at the time, and I sometimes doubted whether Marjorie had acted quite rightly in the matter at first. I now see her wisdom was far greater than mine; but then it looked a bit irregular.

Said Quelch: "It's a bloomin' wonder to me, Comrade Thorpe"—he was prone to wax familiar as work lightened—"you ever came back."

"Came back from where, Mr. Quelch?" I asked.



"*You* know!" said Quelch, slightly abashed at my gentle snub. "Good 'eavens! D'you suppose if *I* ever saw London agen I'd be silly enough to put myself in the hands of that 'Ubble-Bubble devil. W'y didn't you 'and 'im over to the police?"

"Because I wanted to get back here, of course."

"Oh, come orf!" cried Mr. Quelch facetiously. "'Ow was it 'e got 'old of you the second time? 'E's a devil, that man, but I didn't think 'im as smart as all that."

I felt irritated. I did not like being chaffed by Quelch, and I could not quite see the drift of his alleged humour. I suppose he meant that I would have preferred to run away, in London, with some other girl—sort of thing he would do, no doubt. I am afraid I answered rather sharply. I said:

"You dirty little pup, I've saved your life once and for two pins I'd take it away again, so don't let's have any more of your damned impudence. I'd remind you that this is not England." And I laid an arrow across my bow.

Quelch looked dreadfully scared. "No offence, Mr. Thorpe, sir!" he said. "I—I didn't know—I—that is to say I 'ad an idea—Fact o' the matter, sir," he blurted out desperately, "Miss Watkins, she give me to understan'—silly of 'er—that is to say——"

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, Quelch, out with it!"

What are you trying to shuffle off on Adela Watkins now ? ”

“ ’Strewth, sir ! She said somethin’ that give me a silly idea that Miss Marjorie—that Miss Marjorie—that——”

“ Go on,” I snarled. “ That Miss Marjorie, that Miss Marjorie, that Miss Marjorie. Very intelligent remark for Miss Watkins to make. Was that all ? ”

“ She ’inted, sir, that you weren’t exactly—in fact, sir, that you weren’t married when you came ’ere ; and as there’s no *laws*, etceterer, that I can see—Registrars an’ such like—well ? ”

I did not let Quelch get any further, having at last discovered his horrible error. We sat down under a tree, and before we rose again Quelch had the laws of Marjorieland off by heart. Indeed Quelch wept.

“ But ’ow about me ? ” he moaned. “ I ’aven’t got——”

“ A marriage certificate ? I’ll write you one in a jiffey. Miss Marjorie ”—Adela’s title for her had stuck—“ has some very effective ink, which she recently discovered whilst experimenting in beverages. I drank some by mistake. Oh, there’s no difficulty about that, Quelch.”

“ But I don’t *want* to marry nobody,” wailed the terrified Quelch.

“ Well, don’t then. Nobody’s forcing you. I thought you two considered yourselves spliced.”

"Not me!" cried Quelch, in a relieved voice. He seemed quite happy, until I suggested he would find it rather lonely living by himself in the house we would have to build for him—I had already made the new log-house over to Adela, with full rights.

He began to splutter. The scandalous scoundrel had evidently imagined—until now—that Marjorie would permit him to go and live in the same house with a young and attractive woman, like Adela Watkins, without legal ties between them. The problem of settling this misunderstanding without killing Quelch appeared too deep for me, so I waited until we got home, and submitted it at once to the Supreme Court of the Queen's Bearskin.

Marjorie was sitting in front of our house with Adela, sewing. At least Adela was sewing, and Marjorie was neglecting to sew work which she held in her hand as an excuse for bullying Adela. That is what Adela got for being fond of Marjorie. I noticed that the latter had adopted a long buckskin cloak, and I thought it suited her.

Not without a certain amount of diffidence—for I was not yet properly acclimatised mentally, and early training is a powerful thing—I explained the difficulties of Michael Quelch.

"There is no difficulty," said Marjorie dreamily. "Adela's an ass!"

The lady in question looked sheepish. "It's

not as if there was anybody else, Miss Marjorie," she observed. "Besides, you see, Michael and me have been through a good deal, and——"

"I don't envy you your choice," interrupted Marjorie, "but I suppose you know your own mind, Michael Quelch, do you take this woman——"

"No!" shouted Quelch. "I don't! An' I ain't goin' to be bullied into it neither."

"Poor Quelch!" said Marjorie in a gentle tone. "I'm sorry if you're tired, Jack, but it must be done. Please take him back to the tree and turn him loose. Don't forget to bring his clothes back—unless he made them himself—but you mustn't be violent."

On hearing this charitable proposition Quelch grew very pale, but bravely contrived to act as if he thought it a joke. It was not until I laid my hand on his shoulder that he suggested terms.

"I'll live in the new house by myself," he said. "I'm a man that's fond of solitude, like, an' I'd just as soon be alone."

I thought of how Adela Watkins had led him star-chasing through the mountainous wilds of Southern Europe—as we know it—and I laughed. So did Marjorie.

"If you're fond of solitude," she said callously, "I don't see why you are hanging about here. Get out of my country."

Quelch turned to me in desperation. "'Ere!" he cried. "Mr. Thorpe, sir, you're boss here."

"No, I'm not," I answered cheerily. "I have hardly more brains than yourself, Quelch—only, fortunately, in my case I'm aware of the fact."

"But what right 'ave they got——?"

"None whatever. All men are born free and equal. Miss Marjorie has already explained to you that you can clear out of our land, and run your own show elsewhere. You've got the whole world, you know. We are even willing to trade with you if you have anything worth the deal. You might try sheep, for instance, which you seem to have encountered in your travels."

"An' Miss Watkins?"

"Stays here," said Miss Watkins firmly. "I'm free and equal too. You go by yourself—and hunt sheep."

Quelch bleated in a way that surely would have lured an entire herd within his toils. "You can say what you like," he whined, "but it ain't fair. I—I'll——"

"Have the law on us?" I suggested.

"I will if I ever get out o' this," threatened Quelch.

"Oh, for *goodness'* sake, Adela," cried Marjorie, "what *do* you see in the man?" Adela appeared flustered, but did not answer. "She seems absolutely *set* on marrying him," explained my wife. "It'll be a splendid thing for Michael, but I can't imagine how she can do it. This is your last chance," she added, turning to the quailing Quelch. "Are you going to do as I suggest, or are you going?"

He did not answer, and feeling rather awkward in the rôle of jailer I caught his arm and moved him gently toward the path which leads to the ravine. Quelch stared round wildly. I imagine that it seemed impossible to him that he should suffer such oppression. For my own part, had I intended to pitch him bodily over the cliff—as I could have done without let or hindrance, for I was a bit of a wrestler—I could hardly have experienced stronger emotions. With a queer twinge I realised that I was the strongest man in the world, and could in a sense make all my fellow-creatures subservient to my will. *In a sense*, I say, if mere strength and cunning—or even cleverness—were everything.

Quelch walked as far as the ledge, halted, and turned. “Orl right!” he said sulkily.

Whereat we married Adela Watkins to Michael Quelch, and recorded the fact with home-made ink upon the second of the five-pound notes whose rough imitations, in parchment, are utilised for the same purpose at the present day. That is the way in which a custom becomes established. I used the first five-pound note because I had nothing else. Now——

“An old friend of mine,” I said to a *young* friend of mine, the other day, “used to talk perpetually about marrying money. If you do not understand what that means, Julius, it means he spoke, like you, about marrying a fair lady whose father had more tools and a bigger farm



than the next man. Ultimately he married one without a five-pound note to her name."

"And that," said my young friend, "shows that your friend must have been a very wicked man, and she must have been a fool. I don't think you should tell me about these things. Henry Mactavish says that is a thing called eemorality, and it shouldn't be talked about or else it may come in here."

From which it will be seen that he did not quite grasp my meaning.

However, Quelch and Adela were now man and wife, and the real reasons for this strange union were locked in the taciturn mind of Adela herself. Having taken—or having been kicked into taking—the plunge, Quelch seemed to find it not quite so dreadful as he had anticipated. Adela Watkins seemed quite pleased at having a home and husband of her own, and she ruled the latter with a rod of iron—literally on one occasion—developing an unexpected amount of spirit in the process. As for Quelch, the only symptom of dissatisfaction I ever observed was a habit he developed of sitting for hours at a time under the cliff. He used to fill his pockets with gold, before taking his seat, and I have known him to spend a whole Sunday over this pastime—moving, with unquenched hope, from place to place. There were no further exhibitions of "backlash" however.

Despite the late sowing, I reaped a good harvest. We had quite a little herd of growing



calves, a well-stocked pigsty and so much honey—some of it from our own hives—that I postponed experiments on beet sugar out of pure laziness. We also had some half-tame ducks and geese, whose wings it was my painful duty to clip.

On September 18, 2, a youth called William Thorpe joined himself to the community, and had greater success than Michael Quelch in defying the authority of Marjorie. By rights he should have died from living in a draughty hut, and from the lack of many things deemed necessary for people of his age, but the more hardship he suffered the greater he waxed in strength and in all devilry. At the age of nine months he crawled forth and was discovered playing with the cumbrous Tommy. Shortly afterwards he did it again, and might have toppled over the cliff had not that uncanny ursine—who perhaps remembered the fate of his little brother—retrieved him in the nick of time. Tommy could crackle the stoutest deer bone to flinders, but Tommy's iron jaws never left a scratch on Bill's infantile hide. Tommy was a lady bear. Marjorie had the naming of him—or her.

We Thorpes are inclined to be sentimental. Although my son Bill is a man of more than middle age—fifty-five he should be at the time of writing—he is the only adult male member of the tribe who has never killed a bear. He is death on wolves, but his veneration of the largest of our local carnivora almost transgresses the limits of paganism. A bear played havoc with

his garden two years ago come next July, and the stupid fellow risked his life driving it away with an ashplant ; and in a perfect passion he cut the bowstring, and threatened to cut the throat likewise, of young Julius Quelch, who had come to his assistance with more proper weapons.

## CHAPTER XIX

THE quaint-looking, two-man rip-saw which hangs upon my wall was twelve months in the making, but when a man has to be his own metallurgist, smith, carpenter, rope-maker, and everything else down to soap-boiler, it is hardly to be expected that he will do the work with the proficiency and despatch of the specialist. Henry Mactavish says he could whack out a better saw in forty-eight hours—a slight exaggeration—but Henry overlooks the fact that in the days of which I write there was no big trip-hammer at Deerford to flatten out the blade; that I had not yet reaped the benefit of *my own* experiments in tempering steel; and that I can build a better boat than he can in one-third the time, or could whip three foot of shod ashplant through his liver at sixty yards before the stupid fellow knew that I was stringing my bow. Henry Mactavish annoys me intensely—the unchastened cub!

It is not easy to run a one-man community, especially without a saw to cut planking and boards; still I think I can place the finish of our real hardships at the time of my reappearance in Limestone Meadow in the summer of the year two. I brought back so much hope for the future that difficulties, which formerly loomed

stupendously opaque across our paths, now grew translucent, transparent, diaphanous—and vanished. It was only a question of time—so I imagined—before we should enjoy practically every comfort and convenience that we had left behind us.

I was mistaken, of course. I have always been over-sanguine all my life. But, when I come to think it over, I have no regrets that our stubborn grandchildren have failed—or refused the attempt—to manufacture such complex things as the steam engine, fire-arms, or even divorce laws. “Why worry about these vague things,” they say, “when what we already have will serve our turn?” A stiff-necked generation; but perhaps they are right, in a way. The information in my “How to do Everything”—even in the later edition, with the supplementary knowledge gleaned from later arrivals—is pitifully vague on all the more highly specialised arts, for I had such a little time allowed me to compile the book. We have plenty; our world is *under* populated. There is practically no competition; no incentive to crime except jealousy over women. Furthermore, we all know what only artists knew in the Old World, that it is much more fun to make something useful or ornamental for yourself, or some one else you are fond of, than to have somebody else prepare your gear for you with a machine whilst you knock a ball about with a stick to save yourself from boredom.

As old men will, I wander from my subject.

I am getting a discursive old fossil—so says Marjorie—and I must check this tendency. I will return to my tale.

The outer fence and the inner stockade were now completed; and the smoke floated from the chimney of the house where Quelch dwelt—as happily as the Almighty ever permitted Quelch to feel, I judge—with Adela Watkins. The harvest was gathered and the larder stocked. Compared with the previous year everything looked so prosperous and secure that I rather looked forward to the first visit of the wolves. I wanted badly to teach them—as forcibly as might be expedient—who and what we were.

It would almost seem that they, for their part, recognised our rival claim to the supremacy of the winter hunting-ground of their pack. When they did come they came with a rush; and I cannot conceive that the attack was accidental. I firmly believe they made a pre-concerted attempt to storm our settlement and eliminate competition off-hand.

It was toward the end of November, the time about three in the morning, when they fell on. I heard them howling in my dreams, and woke up under the impression that it was young Bill, a healthy-lunged child.

Bill, indeed, was taking no minor part in the general clamour, but his strong solo was little compared to the full diapason blended of wolf-cry, lowing cattle, shrieking pigs and roaring Michael Quelch below. We rolled Bill in the

bearskin, seized torches and weapons, and slipped hastily down to Quelch's back door. The calves were huddling in the corner of their enclosure—scared white ghosts in the yellow flare—and beyond the black stockade which flanked the house to right and left, under a starless sky, we could hear the yell of the enemy and the scurry of his racing feet.

Then there was a shock and over the edge—a good nine-foot jump, with a ditch on the take-off side—popped the grey muzzle of an elderly wolf. Whilst he yet scrabbled with his hind paws to find foothold I smashed him between the eyes with my torch ; and I imagine he was sorry he came.

Not a bit did this seem to deter his comrades, however. They had scented the cattle and the strange whiff of human flesh, and if a miserable timber stockade was to hold them from their prey, why then, let them abjure the name of wolf and run henceforth with the guinea-pigs. Mask after mask we knocked back whence it came—with torch or with axe—and by the time I had finally persuaded the trembling Quelch to quit the safe shelter of his house I had really begun to think our cattle were doomed.

In the end he emerged bearing a stout spear, and with Adela as link-boy behind him. He soon became quite valiant under the excitement of the battle, and I heard him roaring with glee as his thrusts went home. I was just commencing to think the battle won when I discovered one wolf had miraculously climbed to the roof ; and

as I prodded to dislodge him two others succeeded in flying the parapet. One of these landed fairly upon and knocked me down.

I rose with a fang-gashed arm and a vision of Marjorie holding two other assailants at bay with thrusting torch against the wall of the house. Young Bill was not for lupine consumption; a fact which the wolves were quick to grasp, for they abandoned their attack on the fiercer animal of the two strange bipeds to lend their friend a hand with me. They fought as I have seen greyhounds fight, springing in and out with lightning rapidity, and tearing rather than biting at my thighs. One chap snapped close enough to carry away a mouthful of buckskin from my trousers, and his fangs grazed me, but he paid the price. I countered with the axe and got home. He fell, and the other two ran away up the ravine. There were several others who got in during the night after this, but they mostly came in singly, and singly they were hunted down and slain, all but three survivors, who were later encountered in a state of abject terror concealed in the kitchen above. How they got there I know not. I suppose they tried the top of the ravine first, failed to negotiate the upper stockade which guarded it above, and crawled in desperation into the headquarters of the enemy as the least likely place to be searched for them. Two more were trampled in the cattle-pen, and Tommy woke up in time to slay another in the ravine.



Besides all this we got forty more with our bows from the roof of Quelch's house, when daylight came. I think we more than decimated that pack, for it was the last serious attack they made.

When the kitchen-sneakers were unearthed they howled like conscience-stricken dogs, and my heart melted. They raced wildly round and attempted to leap up the high cliff wall as I chased and beat them with a club. In the end they were herded snarling into a small outhouse and thereafter starved, beaten and bullied until there was no spirit left in them.

This sounds inhuman, but it had the effect of making them resigned to a sort of semi-captivity; and I have bred very carefully from the most docile of their descendants. I have done a lot in fifty years. Perhaps if we had applied the same tactics to our womenfolk we men of the "Marjorie"—Good Lord, they have denied the clan even my own name!—might live easier lives.

Nowadays they—the "wolves" not the girls—only prick their ears to the inviting yell in the receding forest. Indeed, their answering growl is hostile in tone. They are debauched by the firesides and regular meals for which they have sold their freedom. Look :

"Wolves, Maggie! Hey, girl! Leu, into 'em! Yah—rh—rh!"

I thought so. The silly old whelp is as excited as a girl with a new dress; and it's high Summer—not a wolf within a hundred miles.

Now she has come back, looking very sheepish, and has stretched out again in the patch of sunlight by the door. The silly old whelp !

. . . . .

I seem to be running short of reminiscences ; but there is so little whereof I can write in the period to which I have now brought my tale. What interest to the outside world has the babyhood of a man whom I have lately heard referred to—by one of our irreverent youngsters—as Old Bill Thorpe ? If Bill is old, by the way, what must *I* be ?

. . . . .

Young Julius Quelch is coming up the garden path between Marjorie's roses. It is his twelfth birthday, by Jingo, and I had forgotten ! Getting a big boy now. Already he could lick his grandfather—were he still alive. Only in surname does Julius resemble Michael, and he is, moreover, the solitary bearer of that surname. Perhaps I cannot do better than make a long jump over six years and tell how *that* came to pass.

. . . . .

Six years from the events recorded in the first part of this chapter—that is to say, in the Autumn of the year 8—I broached a project to Marjorie.

My idea, which I had been cherishing in secret fear for some time, was to make a protracted tour of exploration in the Spring. I thought

that I might, perhaps, make some notable discoveries—perhaps even encounter sheep like Adela and Quelch had. “Bill,” I said, “has attained the mature age of six, Irene is four, Jack is two and a half, and Wilhelmina has survived your theories on nursing children for at least five months. Even if I am devoured by a bear you cannot say that I left you a *lone* widow. I have no authority here, my children mock me, and even Quelch, I believe, despises me in his heart. Let me go when the sowing is done, and I will come back in time for the harvest—if uneaten.”

Marjorie kissed Wilhelmina in that lingering, absent-minded way of hers. I thought she might presently come round and kiss me also, but she only waved my head about a little by the grey hairs which nobody venerated. She seemed to be thinking deeply, and I saw that baldness was imminent if she didn't become conscious of what she was doing soon.

“I don't *want* to be a widow,” she said presently.

I felt the old subtle grip, which I have never been able to shake from me, but my mind was active and my plan was by no means a dodge to sneak away from home. I have a few crude principles, and am occasionally capable of minor sacrifices.

I looked out over the meadow and saw the ox-waggon creaking up the road from the mine under the guidance of Adela Watkins. She wore zouave trousers and high buskins of wash leather, and

a shirt-jacket of the same material. The broad sailor collar of her linen undershirt—a fashion copied from Marjorie—was fastened in front by a big gold brooch. Quelch himself, in buckskin breeks and sandals, was digging in the orchard. He wore no linen garment, for we voted the woven article effeminate in those days, and it was also very scarce. For head covering he wore the wide straw hat, with a chinstrap, which was also one of Marjorie's inventions, and which we still wear in summer.

"Look at that cart," I said. "Perhaps when I come back we will have horses to draw it; and think of woollen clothes for the kids in the Winter.

"They're warm enough in furs," objected Marjorie; "and the cartwheels would fall to bits with horses. What are you fussing about? Besides, if the horses you are going to catch are half as beastly as our cattle, I don't want them. Quelch won't go near the oxen since they trampled him, the coward, and it isn't really right to let his wife drive them."

"No fear of her," I said. "She understands animals. She understands most things. If I had been wise I would have married her and driven you and Quelch out into the wilderness. She is the most industrious woman I have ever met."

Marjorie knocked the shuttle across once or twice in the family loom. "Work!" she said. "If Adela had four children to look after she *might* begin to talk about work. My fingers are

worn to the bone. She spread her firm little brown hands within reach of my lips—"and I'm all crows'-footed with worry. Look at my face."

"I am looking," I said calmly. "It's—it is my habit to look at your face. It's pretty."

Immediately it became more so. "Idiot!" quoth my wife, but failed to make her tone convincing.

I picked up the little looking-glass, which had somehow survived six years' hard usage, and held her so that she could see. The visage that smiled up into hers was extremely sun-burned, and the crows' feet were undeniable, but it was a very attractive, very amusing little face all the same. Marjorie patted her hair.

"Do you think anybody else would think so?" she asked.

"Don't be an ass! Of course they would. You've improved."

"When will I begin to get old and ugly?" asked Marjorie.

"Never, if you keep your heart up. I knew an old lady of sixty that was absolutely beautiful—only not as beautiful as you'll be at her age."

Marjorie sighed and laid down the mirror. Irene immediately picked it up and gazed with her mother's eyes into the depths. "Oo Pit-ee!" she said. "Pit-ee *girl*!"

"Observe your daughter," I remarked. "I have just thought of a new reason for making this trip."

"Hum!"

“I must discover silver. When this looking-glass is broken what will you and Irene and Wilhelmina do for another? A golden mirror would show you all yellow——”

“Silly Daddy!” said Marjorie, crouching beside Irene and teaching the child to despise her father—already. “Silly Daddy!” echoed Irene, and pointed the finger of scorn.

And then there was a crash and a tinkle.

It would be libellous to insist that this was the only reason why I was permitted to go upon my trip.

## CHAPTER XX

**B**EFORE leaving Limestone Hollow, for the second time, I feel it incumbent to give some impression of the place as it appeared in the Spring of the year 9, the year of my last great adventure and the final scene—a rather tragic one in some aspects—of what I may call the patriarchal epoch of Marjorieland.

As I have said before, the cliff, river, and lake run from north-east to south-west, the so-called Eastern Mountains sweeping across at right angles to this major axis and sheltering us pretty effectively from the full effects of the colder winds. Still, Limestone Hollow has rather a northerly aspect; and partly for this reason, but principally on account of the better soil below, I never attempted any cultivation on the ledge except Marjorie's rose bushes round the house.

We still lived in the old house, or rather in a nondescript residence of which the old house formed the nucleus; but at the same time we had completed the four masonry walls of a new and larger building whereunto we were in process of adding an upper story of logs. It was a palace compared to our present low-roofed, rambling bungalow, and I had been working at it for years past.

Cattle pens, pigsties and so forth had been



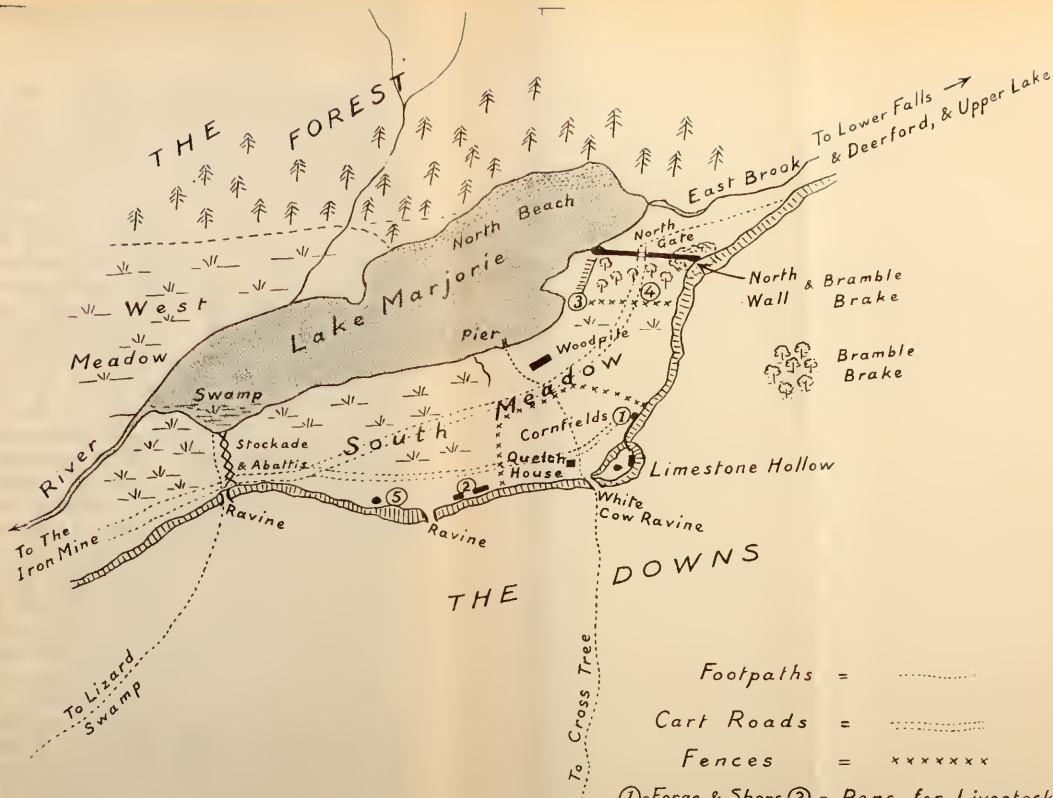
swept—I am thankful to say—to a more suitable spot below. Adela's house still stood on its old site, but the stockade had been pulled down and the timber of it had been applied to other purposes. In front of his premises Michael now cultivated a little garden in peace, and laughed at wolves.

For these gentry were beaten at last. We had gradually built a high wall at the upper end of the lake, where the cliff runs almost due north and south and comes within a couple of hundred yards, or so, of the water. One end of the wall ran into a thick bramble brake at the bottom of the cliff, the other ran out into the water. There was no entry except by the North Gate—the site of North Gate Farm. The orchard wall is the remains of our old wall, and we put it to the same purpose, for it made a very convenient shelter.

A mile to the south-west, where the cliff again approaches closely to the lake—just above the outlet of the river—we had erected an abattis of tree trunks with a ditch beyond; and the heads of all the ravines were stoutly stockaded. Except by swimming the lake, or falling over the cliff, no wild beast might come to us unbidden.

I have drawn a sketch-map of the settlement as it looked then. It may be of interest to future generations.

We were pretty well off in all worldly goods. We had twelve head of cattle—eight cows, two





bulls and two bullocks for draught purposes. We were able to milk the cows, so long as we exercised due caution, and their temper at the moment permitted the feat. We had savage pigs, and flying ducks and ferocious wing-clipped geese—such as would drive the stoutest hearted Old World farmer frantic with fear; several pet wolves threw the pigs and cows into a state of acute terror every time they caught sight of them; but Tommy the bear, alas, had vanished with the guinea-pigs. The call of the wild was too much for Tommy when we began to keep wolves on the premises. Nevertheless the old brute used to come back at times to visit us, always very gentle, although on one occasion he—or she—turned up with a half-grown cub to heel.

Other things we had. Nearly all vegetables and garden produce I had known in the Old World grew and flourished, and most of my fruit tree slips had turned out well. Beehives of bees; honey and butter and cheeses; ducks' eggs and smoked hams; beer and wheaten bread; if we worked hard we did not starve, and many a poor devil surrounded by the luxuries of civilisation would have envied us our lot. I often feel I did wrong in not trying to gain a passage for the unemployed when I had the chance, but I doubt the Hubble-Bubble would have listened to me if I had thought to mention it. Also am I inclined to doubt whether the life would have suited many of them. It didn't suit Quelch, so I suppose there might be others.

I may say that I attribute most of Quelch's villainy—of which I shall presently speak—to bad teeth. He had a good deal of trouble that way ; and I think his health was affected, and *that* made him cantankerous and selfish. Marjorie—and even Adela—would have me believe that he was a scoundrel of malice prepense ; but that is a woman's argument. No man could be such a monster. I prefer to believe—seeing that he behaved fairly well for close on seven years—that an imperfect digestion was the devil's handhold in this instance. However, I am wandering from my tale again.

Imagine me then, in mid-March, reluctantly saying good-bye to a Marjorie somewhat inclined to snivel—as I also—and climbing White Cow Ravine to the edge of the downs. Adela and Bill and Irene came up to see me off, but the others stayed below. At the summit of the cliff I paused for a moment to gaze down upon our home.

It very nearly postponed the trip—that look. Had Marjorie been in sight I could not have done it, but she had crept inside the house to cry. I took great pride in our home-made homestead, every bit of which was the work of our own hands even down to the tools we used to make it and cultivate it and keep it in repair. “However,” I thought, “I am only an adjunct now,” and turning to Bill I gave him his instructions.

“Daddy go to Hebben,” said Irene complacently.

"I sincerely hope not!" I exclaimed, undevoutly—I was rather startled at the suggestion.

"Why?" said Bill.

"Because I don't want to go, at the moment. That's enough for you, Bill."

"Bad! O Bad!" reproved Irene the Beautiful, and hid her blushes on Adela's shoulder. Both she and Bill looked at me doubtfully, and I felt rather nervous.

"I—I would rather wait for mother," I suggested. "How would *you* care to be in Heaven by ourselves with no mother?"

At this thought Irene began to roar, and William, apparently for company's sake, lent her a hand with rude vocal accompaniment. I turned to Adela in dismay.

"It's some silliness of Mike's," she explained. "Letting on you were sure to be snaffled by the beasts down *there*"—she nodded south—"and the kids heard him. He's been filling them with some rubbish, but he won't do it any more *now*—I've spoken to him."

She paused, and dropped her eyes. "Anyhow," she added, "don't take chances. *You* have fire, and your bow, which we hadn't—and you have some common sense. Still it'd be better in a way if the kids were mine so that *she* was free to go with you. Two's company."

She thought a bit more, and added: "For two pins, Thorpe, I'd go with you myself. Only I couldn't leave *her* alone with Mike. Not that

she's not capable to look after herself, but—but the children and all that would be too much."

It may be judged—rightly—that a great change had come over Adela Watkins. She seemed to have expanded in the air of Marjorie-land. It was only of late years I had realised that she was a much larger woman than my wife. She stood very straight, and looked one squarely in the face with the pale blue eyes beneath the flaxen hair; and her lips seemed thinner and firmer than of yore. She had a queer independent manner—quite unlike her husband's pendulum swing from servility to unwarranted familiarity—and she had a way of her own with cattle. She was "Miss Marjorie's" dog—and gloried in it—but "Miss Marjorie's" husband was never anything but "Thorpe" on the lips of this strange Adela Watkins.

We walked a few steps from the edge of the cliff, and again faced one another. There was some unspoken question on the air.

"The trouble with Mike," quoth Adela slowly, "is that he don't recognise the tenth commandment. You know why I married him——"

"I do not," I said fervently. "It has always been somewhat of a mystery to me."

Adela laughed. "There was no one else, silly, and I can keep him out of mischief. Anyhow, I'm a wife now; even if my feelin's to Mike aren't exactly in the nature of a blinding passion. If I was a—was a mother—I'd forgive the little beast a good deal."



The atmosphere of Marjorieland is indeed very conducive to frankness.

"Mike," contained Adela steadily, "never had much—not much of a chance—in the Old World. Neither had I. He was a pawnbroker's assistant, and I was—something less honest——"

"If more profitable," she finished, and laughed in my startled face. "You needn't look so scared, Thorpe—*she* knows. If she'd just let me live here, and nothing more, I'd have respected her. It's her not despising me that's so strange—my Miss Marjorie."

She kissed Irene's cheek, and the baby nestled to her. "I told Quelch some fairy tale," she continued, "because the little beggar was flashing his money about on the boat. I was the sort that travels *incog*."—she laughed again—"and I thought I might as well have it as the next one. Mike, the little sweep, was under the impression that he was leading an innocent girl astray. It's not hard to persuade a fool like him. I'm ashamed of that piece of business, Thorpe, it wasn't sporting—too simple.

"Shall I put down your child, *Mr.* Thorpe?" broke off Adela Watkins; but Irene only nestled closer.

"Don't get nasty, Adela," I said. "What's good enough for Marjorie is more than that for me—other considerations apart."

"Besides," I added, "I like you personally, so why try to force a quarrel?"

"Well, I got my chance in Constantinople,"

continued Adela, relenting, "and I think we all get one. Mike must have let his slip, it seems to me. I came here, as you know, and I've done my best to be decent——"

"You certainly have——"

"That's as may be. If I'd been like Mike—who imagines nothing's right which keeps him from what he fancies at the moment—I'd have had another kind o' chance to take."

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"Well," drawled Adela, with languid insolence, "don't flatter yourself, Thorpe, but you'd have done me a sight better than him—don't you think?—and Mike kept calling me a silly ass for insisting Miss Marjorie couldn't be dead—with the axe lying handy all the time. You're not quite my style, Jack Thorpe, but if I'd had Mike's ideas I'd have put the kibosh on Mike to marry you. I've got the pluck to have done it, haven't I?"

I hope Marjorie will not read this part of my story, for I laughed in my turn. "You've the makings of a pretty fair devil, Adela," I assured her. "But even if my wife hadn't come back I'd have been too gloomy to make a satisfactory husband. Besides," I said, "it'd take time to get over your unhappy Mike—though I'll admit you're a fine woman. Thank Heaven you *are* religious, Adela!"

"Oh, go on with you!" said Adela. She held up the children for me to kiss, and we shook hands. "I'll be responsible," she called from

the head of the ravine. "Do you get yourself back safe—that's all."

A strange woman; but I admired her intensely as I thought of her working out her weird penance as the wife of Michael Quelch. She was far, far too good for him. Then I flushed with pleasure as it occurred to me how deep-rooted was Marjorie's own sweetness to have so tamed this wild creature. I cannot imagine how I came to deserve Marjorie myself; but I know she is literally my true "better half." I think the old idea of "twin souls" had something in it after all, although the jawing of idiots gave people a disgust at the subject. Sometimes the twins are evenly matched, but more often one of the two predominates—male or female, as the time may agree—until the goal is reached. I am conscious that Marjorie is a part of me, but I am equally conscious that she is far nearer Heaven than I am. Perhaps—wonderful thought—I was once a very good man, and Marjorie was my wicked wife. I think I can detect traces of that epoch.

## CHAPTER XXI

**S**OLITUDE is a terrible thing, but I doubt whether it's not preferable to some kinds of society. When the dun-coloured rock on the crag ahead resolves itself into an enormous dun-coloured cat, with six-inch eye-teeth and the obvious purpose of leaping on one's back as one goes trotting by ; when the red deer and the elk run at one instead of away from one ; when the brown bear dances enraged fandangoes across one's path ; when the wolves howl by night and the bulls charge by day—the urus which Cæsar described as nearly as big as an elephant (wherein he lied slightly), and that horrible beast the aurochs—in such circumstances, I say, travel is apt to lose its charm.

I had struck south across the downs to the Cross Tree, and thence south again until I stood for the first time on the banks of the great river. There I camped and erected a small cairn with a stick pointing north, and on a stone I scratched the legend, "MLD 60—M." Then I had arisen in the cold dawn and trekked east along the north bank, and now I was camped in a forest beneath a tree whereof the blaze read "MLD 40 Days."

I could not say how far I had actually come. As a rule, I had kept pretty close to the water—which afforded a refuge when pursued—and I

had been living on fish and small animals I shot and "roots and things." In a terrible way I had been enjoying myself, for I must confess that the holiday away from the influence of the only being who ever made me properly feel the weight of discipline awoke forgotten instincts. My whole journey on this occasion was an unceasing, internal warfare, the terror of the wilderness against the joys of liberty; and now that I had got so far on my way I found, to my surprise, that one-half of me would have been quite content at the prospect of running away for ever.

Once I had weakened badly. I blundered into a swamp full of stinging flies whose bites threw me into a sort of fever for a day or two, and then I was heart and soul for returning to Marjorie. But that was past, and at the moment the whole affair was one great, fear-laden joke. I was a free agent, fighting for my footing with the other free animals of the wilderness.

I stood knee-deep in the shallows with my pack on my back and tried to make up my mind what I should do next. So far I had found nothing of value, and it looked as if I might catch it on my inevitable return to servitude. It seemed to me that the only thing to do was to go on until I *did* find something, or until I vanished for ever down the œsophagus of a bear. I chose a prominent hill with a curious crest for landmark, and plunged south through the sparse forest. Presently I emerged on higher ground, picked out my hill again, and by nightfall had established

a very chilly dwelling-place in a cave on its flank. My further adventures from this point consisted in finding another stream running south, following it down into warmer country and encountering salt water when I imagined the "Mediterranean" to be hundreds of miles ahead. I was out on the north coast of the Great Bight.

"I might have guessed that," I said disgustedly, "from the rapid fall of the stream. No sheep here. Only thing to do now is to go north-east to the high hills.

I went down the coast a bit and hit a pretty big river. Up this I turned and, although I did not find sheep, I managed to land in sufficiently abominable country to have choked the heart out of a Chilcoat. I sat down on a rock one day and faced the situation squarely. "I have," I said, "made an ass of myself."

All around me were snowy peaks and rushing, ice-fed streams. Vegetation was sparse and trees almost non-existent. Here and there wind-twisted pine or a few bushes. The scenery mainly consisted of grey rocks, and it was a cold and cloudy day. It looked very like what my poor dear mother used to call a "judgment."

"I am a lonely man," I repeated mournfully, as my yearning eye sought the steep valley up which I had come. "I will go straight back to Marjorie, and if ever I reach her again I will——"

What act of devotion and repentance was to

mark my home ganging I do not remember. It was still chaotic in my mind when something clicked behind me and I jumped hyper-nimble to the cover of the nearest boulder.

"Mr. Thorpe, I believe?" said a familiar voice. "Is this mere coincidence, or what is it? I don't seem able to get rid of you. Nothing wrong with Miss Marjorie, I hope?" he added hurriedly.

I looked at him sourly. He had given me a horror of a fright, and he looked so infernally complacent about it. He was sitting in a wooden tub, no less, and his fiddle was yet tucked in under his chin.

"Miss Marjorie's all right," I said presently. "We've broken the looking-glass and I'm looking for silver and things."

"What looking-glass?" inquired the Hubble-Bubble.

"I explained how I had amused myself at 10b, Queen Street, and the workings of my patent four-dimensional shirt; and he swore cheerily. "Devil take you," he said. "You're not as simple as you look. However, I suppose I must leave well alone. Would you like a few children to take home? There are some in this house I can well spare."

It was rather strange to hear him talk of "this house" sitting in his tub among the desolate rocks.

"I have four," I explained, "so you better keep 'em. Adela Watkins might like a few, but



it would be quite impossible to take them back. Thank you very much, but I'd rather not."

"They're Swiss children," explained the Hubble-Bubble airily—he seemed in a very good humour. "I do not know their name—Robinson I presume. They yell. They yell because they do not like the noise of the battle. There is a battle going on, and the little beasts are in the other cellar with their father and mother at the moment; but they all come out in the lulls and scream—Mr. and Mrs. Robinson and all the little Robinsons. I am sure you would like them. They have a reputation for your kind of job."

"Not at all," I said hastily. "They'd grumble at not having a wreck to draw on—and all that sort of silly rot. Besides, Quelch's language could not fail to annoy the Pastor even if he survived my own. You'd swear if you had our work to do."

"Very well," said the Hubble-Bubble, "just excuse me a moment. I'll be back again. Don't go." He drew a note from the fiddle-strings and disappeared. I sat down to wait, too astonished almost to think.

After half an hour's absence he flicked into view again between eye-blinks. He had a bundle with him, and he apologised for the delay on the grounds that he had smashed his first tub and had had to rig another. "You see," he said, "the surface contours are all different. One comes through at exactly the same distance from the earth's centre, and I have been experimenting for weeks with a brick on a string to find a place

where one can perform a transit in safety. One does not want to find oneself two hundred feet underground, or a couple of hundred above the earth's surface. If one arrives underground something has to give way, and the other event is equally unpleasant."

"How far is the actual distance travelled, do you think?" I asked.

"So far as I can see, none at all. I always get the impression of passing through an infinite number of worlds; but I do not think one travels in space appreciably—if at all."

"But one must travel *some* distance," I objected.

"Why?"

"Well, to get away from the starting-point."

"Then you suppose that there is a definite number of these worlds, making one grand, four-dimensioned whole?"

"That's the only possible view to take," I said.

"Then, by travelling far enough one gets to the end of this four-dimensioned thing—eh?" asked the Hubble-Bubble, and his dark eyes snapped eagerly. "By the term 'thing' I designate not the world alone, but the universe. Remember you see the same stars as we do. One gets to the end—eh?"

"One gets to the end," I repeated slowly.

"And afterwards?"

"Space—I suppose—vacancy."

"But," said the Hubble-Bubble, "there must be

an end, in your conception, to this space or vacancy. It must have a definite measure. What is beyond that again, do you suppose ? ”

“ It—it’s infinite,” I argued lamely.

“ Neither you nor I know that so that we may prove it,” said the Hubble-Bubble, “ but granting the infinity of space, why not an infinite number of worlds at an infinitely small distance apart ?—an infinity of matter, if you like to put it that way ?—the worlds being inhabited by an infinite number of—er, sparrows, men and such-like, each with a separate identity, but literally numberless, and an infinite God marking the fall of each sparrow in the limitless whole.”

“ Incomprehensible,” I said, for my brain was reeling to the drone of unbearable music—deep organ sounds through which the Hubble-Bubble’s voice filtered thinly from afar—and I was afraid. But perhaps this was only hypnotism.

“ I see your drift,” I added presently. “ Will you be offended if I remark that your—your—er—complaint—your complaint does not seem to be troubling you nowadays.”

“ Oh, yes, it is,” said the Hubble-Bubble. “ I’m as mad as a hatter at times ; but never in this atmosphere—strangely enough. I’ll be as bad as ever when I get back ; but I have my task before me. I’ve looked too close to the sun and got dazzled—that’s all. By the way, my girl’s dead and the fellow has married again ; that looks hopeful to me. I’ve hit on this new method of transporting myself in a tub—lost

the secret, you know, and you four are still the only——

“Devil!” he broke off. “I’m getting horribly mixed. Too many ideas at once. What I mean to say is that I feel near the end of my journey, after which I hope to be allowed my dream after all. You see I discovered your place when I was a young fellow, and meant to live there myself. I was going to settle with my girl, much as I settled you. Only she spoiled it all. Being done in the eye I finally decided—after I had queered my mind for good—to hand the dream on to others. You’re one of the others. Are you grateful?”

I thought it over. “Certainly,” I said. “Thank you very much.”

“That’s right!” cried the Hubble-Bubble. “Now I intend to finish my task, and then I think the score will be worked off. I shall find peace and a chance, perhaps, to realise my own dream. Briefly, I expect to be dead myself soon; and I shall not be quite displeased by the change.”

That last was a curious remark on the part of the Hubble-Bubble. I often wonder if the man had a sort of second sight. I have often felt that his mad self was only a veil between ordinary minds and his own extraordinary one; a veil hung there for a definite purpose. Beyond it was the real man—utterly unconscious of his madness—and knowing things to us unknown and unknowable.

## CHAPTER XXII

“**I**N the meantime,” continued the Hubble-Bubble, “do me the favour of accepting this small present. I am just going back”—he leaped lightly out of the tub and began to prop it up with boulders until it stood a foot or so above the ground—“to look at the battle. Shame people must be killing one another on such a lovely day!”—it looked uncommonly like snow, but I supposed he was referring to the Old World—“and I may return again; so don’t go for another half-hour.”

“Hold on!” I cried. “How about this battle you are talking about? Mightn’t I have just one peep?”

He shook his head. “I think it would be bad for you,” he said, “make you broody. The sooner you forget the Old World and all that therein is the better. I want you to lose the sense of incomprehensible things. It’s a dangerous plaything—a fellow can’t look at His face and live.”

“But one peep,” I remonstrated. “Just one. Well, at least you might let me know where I am and who is doing the scrapping.”

“Where *you* are I don’t know,” said the Hubble-Bubble. “The row at present concentrates itself around a town called Geneva. I

imagine that the English and the French are endeavouring to make the Austrians and the Germans and the peaceful inhabitants of Geneva jointly uncomfortable. There are a few more minor nations at work too, but the English and the French and the Austrians and the Germans are making the largest row."

"Why are they fighting?"

"God knows! I am no politician. I understand that people used to go to war on some comprehensible question—such as whether the Pope had the right to restrain men from wearing whiskers, or such-like purely secular acts—but nowadays they hardly know themselves, I expect. *This* fuss started with a Servian officer called—let me see?—Itchy Whisky, I believe. When you left home nobody but his friends knew of his existence. Nowadays even I have some vague idea of him, though I cannot pronounce his name. He became Emperor of the Balkan Confederation after the third Balkan War—don't suppose he knows himself quite how he did it. Now he has got Bosnia and Herzegovina and a lot more countries including Bessarabia. I think also that I am right in saying that Poland has come up fighting again—but, as I have remarked, I am no politician. The present mode is that Russia is fighting with Poland, Germany is fighting with Russia, Austria—what's left—is fighting with France—no—that's wrong! Russia has had to go in with Austria and Germany now. Hanged if I know! Anyhow Itch—vitch—Itch—

viskey is against everybody within rifle shot, and the rest are alternately trying to scotch the Coalition—that's Itchyitchy—I can't pronounce his name—and making new treaties to slay one another. The Americans are also involved."

He paused and played a plaintive little air in a minor key. "Isn't that risky?" I asked.

"Isn't what risky?"

"The music. Isn't that what sets your apparatus going?"

The Hubble-Bubble shook his head. "My dear fellow, you don't suppose I'm going to tell you the secret, do you? It's partly done by pure will power, if you want to know, and for the rest—why, perhaps, it's done in the ancient style with three hairs off a black cat's tail, and perhaps it's done with an induction coil in the modern. I discovered it by accident, whatever way it's done, and it'll be more than an accident if you or yours ever travel the same road. Look!"

He knit his brows and played one long, quivering note. Nothing happened. "Damn!" said the Hubble-Bubble, and played again——

And, lo, he was not. The four rocks on which his tub had rested remained *in situ*, but tub and Hubble-Bubble had vanished into thin air.

Yet a remarkable link between my solitude and the desperate scenes beyond was now established. The Hubble-Bubble had thrown out a piece of string from the tub, and I could still see the end dangling out of the atmosphere. Naturally I pulled at it.



To my surprise the heel of the fiddle crept into view, and along this came a hand with a note. The note read :

“No larks! Lay your ear to the strings, and listen.”

I did. Although this was the last time I ever had communication with that lost world, the memory of the moment is as bright and new as if I had just this moment turned from the instrument. Clear and fine-drawn along the catgut which linked us came the booming of artillery, the sharp clamour of the rifles, and the screams—the desolating screams—of the Swiss Family Robinson. Now it was very brutal of me to laugh, but I could not help it.

I turned to glance at the morose mountains which penned me in; and up the valley wailed the cry of a lone wolf. A second piece of paper tickled my ear, and as I clutched it the fiddle was withdrawn. Suddenly the damp cold became more intense, and I drew my bearskin around me and opened the note.

“The parcel,” had written the Hubble-Bubble, “contains a baby for the Quelches.”

Now I tolerate this kind of thing in Marjorie, because she knows no better—and, anyhow, I have to suffer her; but may my undying curse hang through all eternity to that base joke which ripped ten years off my life with one stroke of the pen! Even when my trembling fingers had at last managed to negotiate the stiff knots—and the canvas disgorged not the expected infant

but three fair-sized mirrors of the best make, and a friendly message to my wife—even then I continued to swear. Oh, what a low trick that was!

Presently, however, I got my feelings under control again, and I began to peel the inner wrappings of brown paper off the priceless gift. If only I could get these safely home again, what a lot would be forgiven me? I grinned at the black-bearded beast which leered back at me out of the largest of the three, and I wished it had been feasible to bring my precious razors. I am not particularly engaging to look at with a beard and I hate the feeling of hair on my face.

. . . . .

Future generations may read this tale, and picture me—John Thorpe, the Patriarch—as a blond giant with a fierce mustache, and deep blue eyes which can become hard as steel or as tender as summer seas, and all the paraphernalia of the traditional pioneer. Alas for tradition! On the eve of my day of glory as the strongest man—or the most powerful man—on earth, permit me to confess that I stand just five foot seven and am as brown as a berry. I weigh eleven stone nowadays—then I weighed between ten stone and ten and a half—stripped. What I look like, in expression, I do not know. Upon my soul, I never considered the matter. I believe I have rather sharp features—or something like that—because Marjorie once likened

me to a little fox terrier she had, long, long ago, which beast she had named after me.

Marjorie said, "I call him Jack because he's more like Jack Thorpe than anything else on earth," and then everybody would look at the dog and laugh, so the resemblance must have been marked. But none of my readers will have seen a fox terrier, so I might just as well look like an electric light installation for that matter.

This dog was a fatuous beast with a sharp black-and-tan head and a very alert air. Its chief recreation was gazing at Marjorie with a rapt and idiotic grin. It was very wiry and active, a splendid ratter and a desperate fighter; but I could not stand the little brute myself. It was so infernally jealous, for one thing, and it always seemed to be in the way, and of course I didn't dare to kick it as it deserved. One day Marjorie got chased by a bull, and the little beggar pinned the charging beast by the nose whilst she was scrambling over a stile. That was its finish. The bull killed it; and I have to admit that it undoubtedly gave its life for hers, which has caused me to think better of it now that it is dead. If I were Marjorie's fox terrier I could not wish a happier end, though it sounds conceited to say so.

I am, as usual, wandering from my subject. Let it suffice that I am, and always have been, an insignificant, rather swarthy little devil. I have always had to rely on missile tactics and agility rather than on sheer strength, and the

only reason I could handle Michael Quelch—who stood five foot ten and weighed about twelve stone—was that Quelch was a lubber. I know no other word for it. It is a good thing that a real man steps into the story at this point. I was beginning to get above myself.

Marjorie has read these last sheets and wishes me to say that my resemblance to her dog Jack did not depend so much on actual feature as on expression and habits and ideas and so forth. This is extremely vague, to my way of thinking. I hope by *habits* she does not infer that I am a thief, which her dog certainly was. She says people will recognise the resemblance from what I have said. I hope so, but it's more than I can do.

I was aroused from my meditations by a rending crack. The tub had materialised again an inch or two lower, and the tops of two boulders had exploded violently into minute splinters of rock. "Hang it!" cried the Hubble-Bubble, "why didn't you move 'em? If the tub's sprung I'm in the devil of a fix."

The tub was all right, as it happened, but I was not paying much attention to that at the moment. Seated in front of him, in the vessel of his conveyance, the Hubble-Bubble supported what appeared to be a dead man.

The body was that of a big young fellow, not far off six foot, and broad in proportion. His eyes were closed, but the light golden hair and

fair, downy mustache were those of a Teuton of some sort—not the waxy-blonde, Prussian complexion, I judged, but a fair Englishman or a Scandanavian, or something like that. His face was livid under the tan of it at the moment, and defiled with dirt and the blood which still trickled from a gash on his forehead. He was dressed in a well-fitting service uniform of drab, with cord breeches, leathern gaiters and spurs; and the Hubble-Bubble carried his cap—a round *képi* with a flat top and a horizontal vizor—in his hand.

I thought at first that the Hubble-Bubble had murdered him, and in my anger had half drawn my machete before I remembered the battle.

“What *are* you up to now?” I inquired. “Is he dead?”

“Not a bit of it,” said the Hubble-Bubble. “Stunned—that’s all. Austrian shell struck the house a minute ago, and this chap got a thump from a section of the coping. Did more damage to the coping stone than his head, I imagine. He’s a Dane by the look of things.”

He disposed his captive comfortably on a stretch of short turf, whilst I ran to the nearest brook for water to bathe his head. “What a dirty trick!” I panted, as I dabbled the youth’s forehead with the Hubble-Bubble’s pocket-handkerchief. “Why can’t you take him back before he recovers consciousness. You’re ruining the career of a promising young officer and—and——”

“Piffle!” said the Hubble-Bubble. “I think

this should make a better subject than Quelch. Besides, I have so few opportunities. This one was ideal. They came tearing along the road—I was looking out of the window—and just as they swept past the house the shell landed fairly under the eaves. The Swiss Family Robinson gave a bitter cry; up went their scuts, and down the cellar stairs they dived like startled frogs. The detachment galloped on laughing—there were only a dozen of 'em, and I think they were on the run—but this chap began to rock in the saddle, and presently rolled over his horse's neck under the window. There was no one to see, so I nipped out and gathered him in."

"But if the Swiss Family were in the cellar?" I objected.

"There are two cellars in the house. I'm doing my work in the least safe of the two. I think he's coming round."

The Dane sighed heavily and a little colour came back into his face. Slowly the big blue eyes opened and his forehead wrinkled with thought. "Engelsk?" he inquired faintly.

I nodded, and his face became easier; but now his eye fell on the bearskin which covered him and my own peculiar garments. A look of astonishment followed. He glanced over his shoulder at the Hubble-Bubble, who grinned a saturnine grin.

The Dane's elbows contracted, and I helped him to struggle to a sitting position. His eye



swept the gloomy cloud-cribbed landscape of harsh rock and scraggly pines, and from his lips there burst a long, sustained whistle. On and on it went until I began to think he kept his lungs supplied with an air pump. He had a fine capacity. It was more like a railway locomotive in operation than human music.

Suddenly the sound died, and he turned again to me: "Dat hright, den?" he said gently. "Ay go to Hell?"

It was such a natural mistake, and his peculiar, quaint, gently-monotonous drawl made the remark sound so infernally funny that I began to laugh. This set him going also, and having a joke in common—devil of a joke for him!—we began to feel friendly.

"It's not quite so bad as that," I assured him. "This gentleman will explain matters."

The Hubble-Bubble looked at him sharply. "Hopeless!" he grunted. "Merely a waste of breath. Explain yourself." He jumped into the tub and tucked in his violin under his chin.

"Who bring me here?" asked the Dane.

"He did," I said, and I pointed to the musician, who, now that I come to think of it, was not unlike Satan in his personal appearance. The Dane drew his long, shining sword.

"Ay get *him* anyvay," he remarked with simplicity, and made a sweeping cut at the Hubble-Bubble's head. Fortunately for the latter there was no hitch in the operations this time. The fiddle sang, and the sword slashed thin air.



I caught the youth by the arm and endeavoured to explain.

I think he finally grasped the idea to a certain extent, despite the Hubble-Bubble's pessimism. He seemed to consider what had happened in the light of an extremely rich joke, and he would insist on prodding round the vanishing place of the tub with his blade. "*How* can I not fin' dat fo't dimension vith my sword?" he giggled. "Ay taenk you—you pull my leg—heh?"

"Not a bit of it, Mr. Herr—what is your name, might I ask?"

"Ommundsen—Peder Ommundsen—Lieutenant—Vun Hoondred andt firs' Fälster Hussars—Ay s'pose Ay devil now t'ough."

"I must repeat, Lieutenant Peder Ommundsen, that you are not where you seem to imagine yourself to be. If we have any luck I shall take you back to quite an agreeable country, though—though—I say—have you any relations living?"

"'Ay got nine broder'," quoth Peter Ommundsen, "an' Ay got fader. Ay not see dem again?"

"Afraid not."

He sighed. "Dey get ofer it. Ay soldier"—and presently he laughed again. "Vere ve go now?" he asked.

"I think we'll bivouac down in the gorge," I suggested. "It's getting late, and it's going to be stormy."

At this moment the tub clattered back behind us, and the head and shoulders of the Hubble-

Bubble appeared in mid-air. "Hold that man!" he cried. "Tell him I'm not Mephistopheles! I want to talk to you."

"It's just this," he continued, hanging down from nowhere; "if your theory is correct, and there is a definite *distance* between worlds along the fourth dimension, how would I be able to do as I am doing. My backbone, in such a case, would be twisted along a route that is not understandable to us—in passing from one world to the other, that is. It seems to me that that would break it, whereas, as a matter of fact, I suffer no inconvenience."

"You may be right," I said. "But how about Mr. Ommundsen, here? Are you going to leave him as he is?"

"He's got his sword," said the Hubble-Bubble, "and here's a blanket." He threw it to us as he spoke. "With regard to—ah—domestic affairs—I'm afraid it's a more difficult problem than your case or Quelch's. He'll just have to put his trust in Heaven and wait. Is there any—er—young lady to whom you have an attachment, Lieutenant?"

"Dere tvelve yoong lady vith whom Ay haf attachment."

"Any particular one, I mean."

"No"—after a pause—"Ay taenk you bedder send us vun or tvo yoong lady. Ay laek all kind—Ay laek Engelsk girl if you got no Dansk—Ay like girl vith——"

"Hey!"—the Hubble-Bubble was withdrawing

himself into the beyond—"Ay laek som'ting dhrink, tvo—Ay laek——"

"You like too much," said the Hubble-Bubble severely, "but I'll see what I can do for you. Not here though. You go home with John Thorpe and wait."

"*Au revoir*, Thorpe," he concluded. "I won't say good-bye, for we'll meet again I hope."

We stood alone beside the abandoned tub.

## CHAPTER XXIII

“**V**ERE ve go now?” repeated Lieutenant Peder Ommundsen, late of the Hundred and First Fälster Hussars.

“Marjorieland,” I said firmly. “It’s no use your prodding round that tub. He won’t come back.”

“You sure he nod Deyvel? Ay taenk Ay get kill, still. Dis plaace uncommon laek Hayle!”

“If you’re dead, I am,” I said. “The man’s only a mad scientist who’s made rather a curious discovery. He played the same game on me years ago.”

“More den aanyti’ng else in de Vorl,” said Ommundsen inconsequentially, “Ay laek som’ beer.”

“When we get home,” I said, “you can drink beer until you burst—drink it out of a cow’s horn, like your ancestors did—but for goodness’ sake let’s get down into the hollow before it get’s dark.”

At the mention of this refreshing drink Herr Ommundsen’s eye brightened. “Ay com’ vith you,” he said simply.

What need to dwell much farther on the details of that journey back? Those who know Peter Ommundsen will realise how the thought of the glorious prize in store would stimulate his manly

spirit, and I did not need to look twice to see that his companionship was going to more than halve my difficulties for me. By the end of May we were past the head waters of the Seine, and I was jubilant at the thought of getting back to Marjorieland with three looking-glasses, and a new friend—a friend, moreover, one could trust to the death, for we had already encountered enough minor adventures on the way to prove that to the *n*th.

It was here—on the Upper Seine—that we encountered the sheep. I have been accused of romancing, both with regard to this matter, the fight with the plesiosaurus and my killing of a stag with the velvet half off his antlers in June. Henry Mactavish is probably behind the libel. He has never seen sheep on the upper Seine—he has only been there twice—nor has he, or any other man, found a plesiosaurus knocking about. Therefore according to Henry these things cannot exist. I can only assure my readers that these things I *did* meet with, and remind Henry that he has never seen his own brains.

We found a herd of about fifty sheep, I say, on the Upper Seine. I shot six ewes and a ram, and we captured ten lambs, four of which died on the voyage down. Peter will bear me out.

After that we were faced with the problem of getting our captives home; but we solved this by cutting down trees, with my machete and

Peter's sword, and building a raft. The current, though swift, is only dangerous in four places, and the worst of these we negotiated by letting the raft shoot the rapids by itself. We moored it to the bank, and I waited above until Peter had travelled down to the smooth water below. Then I cast loose the painter, and let the raft take its chance. It came through all right and Peter swam out and got it ashore. He was a strong swimmer, and saved his life thereby when he got knocked overboard shooting the First Cataract. I was in a blue funk when I saw him go overboard, but the ruffian came up laughing. A useful man, Peter!

So it came about that sleeping on the raft and only coming ashore to get fodder for the lambs, we saved so much time that we sighted the foothills of the Eastern Range on the first of July. The river takes a big bend to the north here, approaching the southern end of the mountains. I suggested to Ommundsen that, in place of continuing our journey by Sixty Mile Camp and the Cross Tree, we should try to discover a short cut across the mountains. We beached our raft and herded our lambs—now fairly docile—before us to the north. It was slow progress we made, but a week's travel found us amidst granite and heather at a point I judged to be not far off the headwaters of the East Brook which flows into Lake Marjorie. I lost a day by getting into the wrong valley at first; but crossing a ridge we saw the forest and downs

in the distance, and caught the glint of the lake.

We struck another brook, and late in the evening of the tenth we turned a corner and found ourselves at the eastern end of the little tarn we call Upper Lake. Ommundsen gave a shout as his eye fell on the turf-roofed stone hut which stood in a walled enclosure on the south shore. We were pretty well petered out with hardship, and I think he imagined the great moment had arrived, and I was loath to inform him that sixteen miles of broken ground yet intervened. That last is more than a day's travel when herding sickly lambs.

We held a consultation over the six survivors of the flock, and came to the conclusion it would be safer to rest them for a few days. I discovered that Marjorie had provisioned the hut in my absence, so on the morrow I left Peter very happily engaged with our ham and home-brewed and dropped down the water alone.

The murmur of the brook mingled with the swish of my sandals as I sped easily down the faint trail our feet had already worn between Upper Lake and Limestone Meadow. I was on familiar ground again, and my only anxiety was to discover how my family had fared in my absence. I was not long in discovering what I may call indications.

It was just where the brook enters the forest, by Lower Falls, that I became aware of a high thin sound which rode clearly above the roar of



the cascade. Peeping down through the bushes to investigate I saw Irene the Beautiful standing by the water's edge, and howling as if her heart would break. She had both fat hands clasped to her hindquarters, and my first idea was that she had merely sat down too abruptly. Rather annoyed to find the child straying about by herself, I slid down over the rocks and picked her up.

"What's the matter, Irene?" I said. "What are you doing here by yourself, you naughty girl?"

Irene choked, gasped and stared in bewilderment. The voice was the voice of Jacob, but the beard was an unfamiliar feature in her eyes.

"Daddy!" she shouted triumphantly, after a moment's hesitation. Then she threw her arms round my neck and began to cry louder than ever.

"For heaven's sake, Irene," I cried, what is the matter. Are you hurt?"

"No!" the crying became louder and louder, than choked off into stifled sobs as she buried her face on my shoulder. I saw that fright more than pain was at the root of her trouble.

"Did you come here yourself, Irene? Do be good now and stop crying. You're quite safe with Daddy."

"'Dela bwrought Iwene. Oo—oh, bad! *Bad!*"

"Who's bad? Adela?"

"Bad *Mike!*" shrieked Irene with a new tone of indignation—she is her mother's child

and rage overcomes fear in her—"Bad! Bad! Bad Mike!"

Just at this moment I caught sight of something unusual beneath the bank ahead, and I held Irene tighter and ran.

Adela Watkins was crumpled up on her face among the roots of a big beech tree. I thought at first that she was dead—indeed her injuries were such that I dropped Irene, and forbade her to come closer. I was overcome with a horrible feeling of nausea, and I dared not think what greater tragedy might be at the back of this. This discovery, and Irene's incoherent wailings about Michael Quelch!

Of course, as a hunter, I was used enough to the sight of blood; but this was different somehow. I suppose the mere fact that the victim was a woman, perhaps coupled with the additional fact that she was a personal friend, helped to upset my control. Anyhow it is providential that I did not lay hands on Michael Quelch that day, and the less said about my thoughts on the matter the better.

Briefly, what had happened was this: Someone—presumably Quelch, for it could be no other—had struck at the head of the woman now lying unconscious before me; I imagine at a moment when her attention was diverted. Luckily the blow had been turned by an overhanging branch. She had gone down before a partly spent blow with the back or the flat. Following this an attempt had been made to cut

her throat, fortunately in a bungling manner, which argued extreme terror coupled with lack of anatomical knowledge. I remembered, as I noted all this, that Quelch never hunted or slaughtered—he professing a horror of bloodshed.

I tore the collar from her linen undershirt and started to bind up her wounds as best I could. “Much as bloodshed revolts you, Mr. Quelch,” I thought, “I fear you are not done with the sight of it yet awhile—that is to say if you live long enough.”

Then I lit a fire and called Irene to me. It was out of the question carrying Adela back at the moment, for I was out of strength and I felt speed was essential. “Irene,” I said, “you have got to be a very good, brave girl and help Daddy. Do you understand?”

She clenched her baby teeth, and nodded. She seemed to understand, although she was only four years old.

“Very well then. You must sit by this fire and Adela and not move until Daddy comes back. If bad beasts come throw burning sticks at them. If Mike comes show him this.”

I repeated my instructions again as I pegged out “this”—a square of linen torn from the shirt—on the ground. I cut my arm and scrawled my message to Quelch on it with the blood.

What was it? Well, perhaps it were wise to forget that. I did not anticipate any further

harm should Quelch happen that way again and read those words. He knew I was not given to idle promises.

I repeated all that I had told Irene for the third time, picked up my weapons and ran on.

## CHAPTER XXIV

THE North Wall gate was open as I came through, and before me—with a gasp of relief—I saw the chimney-smoke curling above Limestone Hollow. I imagined at first that I had forestalled Quelch, if he meant further mischief, and I felt half inclined to turn back to where I had left Irene in the forest. I changed my mind when I saw Bill running along the cart-track toward me.

At first he seemed to be running in an aimless sort of way—as if he was merely playing one of his solitary games—but when he caught sight of me he paused, threw up his hands in a curious gesture of childish despair and began to run again.

“Daddy, come quick!” he gasped—the beard could not disguise me from *his* eyes.

“What’s the matter, Bill? Is your mother hurt?”

He shook his head and his lip trembled. “Mike’s *stealing*,” he repeated earnestly, “and—and he’s being *rude*. Mother told me to run away, and Mike called me a little devil and wouldn’t let go, but mother said ‘run! run!’ and I bit him and he let me go.”

“Don’t cry,” I said sharply. “Take this spear and go on up the brook to Lower Falls.

You'll find Irene there with Adela. Adela's ill and mustn't be disturbed, but you can sit by the fire with Irene and frighten off the beasts till I come. I'm going to be rude to Quelch now, so scuttle off as fast as you can. If I don't come back soon and you begin to get hungry, lay branches over Adela as if she was a dead deer and walk as fast as you can to Upper Lake. There's a new man in the house there, and you must tell him exactly what's happened—everything! Can you do all that?"

Bill thought he could, so I left him also—both my kids alone in the forest!—and skirted swiftly along the base of the cliff. I cast loose my arrows and loosened the machete in its sheath before I began to climb the ravine. Lightfooted as a stalking wild cat I crossed the intervening space to pause in astonishment within two yards of the bolted door. The wattled walls of our house were by no means soundproof and I could hear every word uttered within.

"What's the use of arguing?" said the voice of Marjorie, her quiet drawl was as unemotional as if she were giving orders about the planting of the orchard. "I'm not going to give them up and I'm *not* going with you, whatever may have happened to my husband."

"Very well then——" said Quelch viciously, and I half leaped forward, for Marjorie had screamed shrilly. "Don't move now!" rasped Quelch, and as if the order were directed at myself I mechanically paused

"No!" gasped Marjorie—it was queer to hear Marjorie under stress of strong emotion when I felt so supernaturally calm—"I'll come then, but not *that*."

I heard Quelch fall back, and whatever the danger had been I knew it was now in temporary abeyance. I dropped quietly on my stomach and crawled closer.

"It's what you said yerself," laughed Quelch. "No laws 'ere but w'at we make to please ourselves. I 'ad to pertend to marry that Adela Watkins to suit *your* silly ideas; now you toe the line to suit *mine*, d'ye see?"

Marjorie was silent for a minute. "I see," she said presently. "Everything you have you owe to Jack Thorpe, but you don't suppose I'd be stupid enough to count on that, do you?"

"I do not. If you'd played fair an' we'd lived sociable-like with each of us free to do as 'e or she pleased—same as it ought to be—I'd maybe 'ave acted different. But no! Yer try to come the bloody aristocrat over me, so you can just take a dose of yer own medicine. I'm boss 'ere now."

Marjorie laughed, and I shook with pride, for this is what she said. I don't see why I should not repeat it, because it brought one or two things sharply home to me—and I am an old man—and well, I think it is worth recording.

"Quelch," she said, "before I came to this country I had an income of my own of ten thousand pounds a year—besides my face, which



more men than Jack Thorpe and yourself have thought attractive—do you know what ten thousand pounds a year means in England?

“This friend of ours—the Hubble-Bubble man—took all that away from me and he gave me Jack Thorpe instead. I’d known Jack since I was a baby, but I’d never taken him seriously.

“Instead of all the comfortable things I had grown accustomed to,” she continued, “I had to live in a miserable, draughty hut with a mud floor, and eat the roughest kind of food. I had to wear the skins of animals for clothes, and I had to help Jack to do work that is left to the cheapest kind of labour in England—work that would make an English labourer feel pretty hardly used if he had to do it with the tools we had.”

“Thorpe made you do that?” interjected Quelch, in a shocked voice. Marjorie laughed again.

“Made me?” she murmured—she appeared to be speaking half to herself and half to him—“I’ve seen him rub salt into the sores on his hands, when he thought I wasn’t looking, and then come to me with a string of lies about how little there was to do and wouldn’t I just sit on a log and talk to him whilst he did the work”—this was a gross exaggeration, but it was good of her—“I’ve seen him promise faithfully that he’d wake me when my turn came to keep watch”—I am well aware that any fellow would do the same, but I’m giving Mar-

jorie's point of view, remember—"and then sit up all night himself. He's a deceitful little beast, Jack Thorpe."

"*Was*, you mean," grunted Quelch. "I tell you 'e's dead. I seen 'is body."

"You'll see it again in a minute, Mr. Quelch," I thought.

"I believe you're lying," said Marjorie cheerfully. "You told me he was dead before; and then the Hubble-Bubble——"

"The 'oo?" shrieked Quelch.

"The Hubble-Bubble—the madman—he came back here a few nights before Jack's return, and I spoke to him."

"W'y didn't you tell me?" wailed Quelch. "Well, any'ow that's another count in the score I've to settle. What did 'e say?"

"He said," continued Marjorie, "that Mr. Thorpe was with him, but he would not let me know his plans. He said he had left it open to Jack whether he returned or not. He said that if I liked, I might go back to the Old World; but that to do so I must give up Jack. He would insist on his returning here with—with another woman in such a case. All he asked was that I should promise not to tell people who I really was, and that I should live in South America on money he was to provide—of course I'd have had to do that in any case, on account of the baby—and he promised me that I should have more money than I had lost on account of their thinking me dead. The other choice was just to live

here and see what Jack was going to do about it. Jack had five thousand he could collect any day in London, but I think the Hubble-Bubble knew his man. I think he was just playing with us both. He does play with people."

"What?" cried Quelch. "you'd sooner 'ave stayed 'ere among them wild beasts an' all that? I don't believe yeh!"

"Well, don't," retorted Marjorie, and there was a pause.

"Well!" said Quelch, "*you're* a soft 'un!"

"I am," said Marjorie. "I'm just mentioning all this in the rather vain hope that you will stop insulting me by saying that what you offer is as good as the other. You come whining that you love me; and then you whine again because you missed a chance to leave the place when the Hubble-Bubble was here."

"I don't believe 'e was 'ere at all," said Quelch. "W'y did you keep it dark all this time if you're tellin' the truth now?"

"He made me promise to tell nobody—not even Jack. I'm breaking that promise now, but perhaps it's better you should know the truth of the matter. Then you can't grumble later at what's probably going to happen to you. I am going with you now to save my children; but you'd far better count the cost."

"I'm only makin' you marry me same as you made me marry Adela—that's all it comes to, my gell!" said Quelch, but his voice shook uneasily.

Marjorie snorted. "I'm not going to argue with you," she said. "If you've no sense of your own responsibility toward anybody or anything else it's no good my trying to teach you. You had the whole world to choose from and you chose to live here. We came here first, and we have our own laws, which I consider very just ones. You're a pitiful sneak, Michael Quelch, if you can't even be honest with yourself. Where do you wish to go?"

"We're goin' to that island o' yours first," said Quelch. "The raft's provisioned an' all, so you may's well get a move on."

"And who will look after the children until Adela returns?"

"They'll 'ave to look out for themselves," said Quelch. "You can bolt the door and they won't come to any 'arm."

"I won't do it!"

"Yus, you will. I'm makin' the laws now, an' the law says that she 'oo disobeys 'er 'usban's orders gets 'er bloomin' little babies' throats cut—see?"

I at last grasped the reasons behind this strange docility on the part of Marjorie; and I could hear her breaking down. It was very difficult to have to listen to her crying before a man like Quelch and to do nothing. Anticipating his appearance in the doorway, I rose to a crouching position and drew my knife. I heard her take the child from him and tuck her up in her cot—it was Wilhelmina he had hold of—and I moved softly a

step nearer. Quelch was, to all intents and purposes, a dead man.

And then I had to lose the chance of a lifetime by stepping on a twig.

Quelch gave a startled cry as the sound reached his ears—his nerves must have been very much on the stretch—and there fell an alert silence on both sides. I stood stock still for a moment until I remembered that he could easily see me by peering through any of the numerous cracks in the wall; on which realisation prompt action became the order of the day, and I cast myself savagely against the bolted door.

It stood my first attempt; Quelch howled like a dog, and I heard the clash of a warded blow. Followed a scream as I burst through the remains of the door and inner wall, just in time to see him dive outwards through the latch on the other side. He was swinging a machete, but Marjorie stood unharmed in front of the cot which contained Jack and Wilhelmina. I noticed she had a stick in her hand, but did not pause to ask questions. I was just in the act of following Quelch when she hauled me kicking backwards from the hole.

“Go round!” she shouted, as usual the more self-possessed of the pair in this emergency. Unfortunately Quelch heard the cry as well, and abandoning his fine strategic position—where he could have sliced my head off with the greatest ease as I came sprawling out—he shot forth toward the ravine as I doubled back through the

door. The ravine takes a turn just above the ledge, and when I reached this point Quelch was already out of sight. I scrambled up to the top, however, and got three shots at him, the last of which pinned him in the left arm. Pursuit was out of the question, considering my debilitated state after the long journey and improper feeding, so I turned back, cursing, to break the news to Marjorie.

## CHAPTER XXV

MARJORIE listened to all I had to say as quietly as she usually does when matters are really serious. She quite saw the gravity of the situation, but she was far too brave to show the fear—not for herself, but for Bill and Irene—which she must have felt. For my own part, I confess I threw myself entirely in her hands. “You do the thinking, Marjorie,” I suggested, “and I’ll do the active part. Orders?”

She smiled wanly. “You’re a good boy,” she said. “Run back as fast you can, and I’ll follow you. We’ll all camp at the North Gate, where he can’t roll rocks on us. The house must go if needs be. I’ll wait for you there till dark.” I kissed her frantically on the nose and ran.

I was not troubled by the idea that Quelch might attack her again, for I knew he must have caught her unawares the first time. I found her bow and arrows outside the window—where he had thrown them with all the other weapons within reach—and I knew that Marjorie with that instrument in her hand, *and* on the alert, was a match for five or six Michael Quelchs. She’s not a perfect housewife, my Marjorie, but she makes up for it in other ways.

I hastened along as fast as my aching legs would carry me, and half an hour later ran full



tilt into a scene of rural peacefulness, at Lower Falls, that dissipated my fears in a ripple of laughter.

Adela was still lying unconscious under the bank. Her breathing was slow but regular, and she had a fairly strong pulse. I had good hopes for her recovery, as there was no fracture that I could discover, and the gashes on her neck had not severed any large artery. What made me grin, however, was the comportment of my two babes in the wood.

Evidently Bill had made himself at home. He had speared, or tickled, a good fat trout, which was at present broiling in the embers; and he sat beside the fire with a portentous frown on his heroic brow and his hands folded round his knees. I imagine he was picturing to himself what he intended to do if Quelch appeared on the scene and tried to steal the trout.

Irene was on the other side of the fire, her fat legs stuck out stiffly before her and one eye on the fish. At intervals she cast a stone into the nearest thicket, chanting the while a sing-song refrain highly uncomplimentary to bears. Over and about them the dappled sunlight chequered a carpet of dead leaves and soft turf, and a small red squirrel dodged round and round the trunk of a tree to take peeps at them.

I think they were rather annoyed at having to go home.

It was out of the question to carry both Adela and Irene; but now that my mind was at ease

with regard to events at Limestone Hollow there was not any great need for making haste. I got the unconscious woman on my back and staggered as far as my strength held out, the children toddling along quite happily in my wake. They evidently saw the humour of the situation, although its gravity was mercifully beyond them. Thus by carrying and resting I managed to transport Adela to within half a mile of the wall. At this point Irene gave out and wept, complaining that she was too tired to walk further. There was nothing for it but to leave Bill on guard again and take her as far as the gate, where I found Marjorie waiting with the other two. I handed over Irene, now half asleep, and returned for the others, leaving Marjorie to make arrangements for the night. Then I gathered up my helpless burden again and with Bill at my side I tottered in, about half an hour after sunset. I fell down in the orchard, too exhausted to speak, and thereafter knew nothing more until:

“Jack! Jack! For goodness’ sake, wake up, Jack, and don’t make a noise. *He’s coming back!*”

I groaned wearily, to find Marjorie kneading heavily at my ribs, and glancing upwards with dull wonder found the sun shone high. I was lying under a shrubby apple tree on a bed of skins, and the children were sitting round the remains of breakfast as quietly as children might be expected to do in such a case as the present one.

Marjorie, very hollow-eyed, laid her fingers on my lips, and I sat up feeling desperately foolish. It appears I had let her watch all night whilst I snored in comfort.

"Surely not, Marjorie?" I whispered. "He wouldn't dare! It's daylight."

"It's nine o'clock, you pig," she said. "Listen!"

I listened. If it was indeed Quelch he would appear to have become clean bereft of his senses in the night; for he advanced upon us with rock spattering tread to the lilt of a whistled marching tune which ran tripping along over a series of staccato semiquavers to a bump at the end of every second or third bar. I laughed aloud. "Confound him!" I said. "He's deserted the sheep. That's not Quelch, Marjorie; that must be Peter Ommundsen marching to our relief. I don't suppose he knew we were in trouble—unless he's got the gift of second sight—but I infer the beer gave out."

"Who's Peter Ommundsen?" Marjorie seemed a trifle surprised for once in her life.

"I'll tell you about him later. I met the Hubble-Bubble again. I've got lambs; I've got looking-glasses; I've got Peter, and I've got home. It's all right. Open the gate."

I jumped up and opened it myself, whilst Marjorie was trying to get the sag out of her lower jaw so as not to appear too imbecile before the critical eye of Peter; and in under the lintel strode the sweating ex-Lieutenant of Hussars, in

his tattered uniform and down-at-heel boots. I noted with a thrill of joy that under each oxter he transported an indignant lamb.

"Ay put de oder' lamps in caave," he said, smiling shyly at Marjorie and the children, "andt Ay mak' vall for keep dem in. Ay taenk maybe Ay bedder com' down."

"What made you do that, Peter?"

"Ay taenk maybe som'ting hrong. Ay vait in hut, lak ve arrange, until dis morning. Dis mornin' pfeller com', 'bout half pas' four"—I glanced at Marjorie—"andt Ay heer heem com', andt Ay look out. He vas lean ofer vall andt look at dose lamps.

"Ay say, 'Hullo!' andt he say, 'Hullo!' Ay say, 'vat you vant?' an' he say, 'Not'in'.' He say, 'Who you? How you get here? You bane catch by Hubble-Bubble?'

"Ay say, 'Vat Hubble-Bubble?' an' he say he gif me goold if Ay show vay back by London. Vay he taalk Ay taenk he mak' sure Ay pfrien' of dat pfeller who look laek devil.

"Den Ay aask heem hees naame. He say, 'Qvelch.' Ay say, 'Vy you not say so before? Now Ay know you—you lif vith Yohn T'orpe,' vereby he look surprise' an' say, 'Yes; Yohn T'orpe sen' me pfor dose lamps.'

"Ay say, 'If Yohn T'orpe sen' you by dose lamps, how you not say so before—how you not know me? Ay taenk, my pfrien', you dam' liar.'

"Den," concluded Peter naively, "he hrnun

away, andt Ay shase heem with my sword ; but he hrun too fas'. Ay say, ' Maybe som't'ing hrong ? ' andt Ay hide provision andt dose lamps togedder in caave. Ve safe dose in aany case."

" And then you come on down here ? I think Peter, you've saved the situation. I had no idea you were such a brilliant strategist."

Peter blushed. " Ay stupid pfeller——" he began, when his eye suddenly fell on Adela. " How ? " he broke off sharply. " Vat dis ? "

I told him all that had happened, and I think that Quelch would not have cared to see the honest gentleman's face at that particular moment. He flushed, and his lips drew back savagely in a vicious snarl.

" By —— ! " he cried. " Dat dhirty trick ! Ay kill dat pfeller ! " He glared round, as if he expected to observe the culprit hiding among our young apple trees, and Irene at once set up a howl. This softened Peter, who is fond of children, instantaneously. He picked her up and produced his hunter watch, a watch the like of which Irene had never cast eyes on before. The yells ceased as suddenly as they had begun, and I saw that Peter was going to be popular in Limestone Meadow. Peace fell like a curtain, for, now that we had two men and Marjorie to defend the settlement withal, there was not much fear of surprises. We even decided that it would be quite safe to return to the house ; which we did that same morning.

There is a good deal of mystery attached to

this exploit of Michael Quelch ; and it seemed incredible at first that a fellow Englishman—a peacefully brought-up Londoner to boot—could sink so unexpectedly to such depths of scoundrelism. Funnily enough, however, there came into my mind as I pondered the matter certain true tales of the doings of old-time pirates. Somehow, in the Old World, one always had the impression that such characters were an extinct race ; but come to think of it this was sheer lack of imagination. Human nature does not change itself in three generations, and the germs of criminality must lie dormant in many a man, only awaiting the removing of the wholesome dread of punishment to wax into active virulence. I picture Quelch as having been such a man. His early environment had not only kept him in check, but had crushed his virility, so that as I first encountered him he was vicious yet not dangerous. Under more favourable conditions of living he had got bolder and more determined on the purely physical side of him, but unfortunately his moral character had stayed where it originally was—that is to say at absolute zero. He had, as far as I can determine from personal observation, not the slightest trace of sense of duty or responsibility to others. Added to this, and quite likely behind most of this, he had the trouble with his teeth which I have mentioned. The result lay before us.

I am still in the dark also as to what actually happened up the brook. When Adela recovered consciousness a week later she could just remember



starting from Limestone Hollow with Irene ; but beyond that point the blow seems to have destroyed her memory. She knows that their object was to pick berries.

I gather from Irene, who remembers a good deal, that Quelch followed them, and that he and Adela seem to have quarrelled. Later they patched it up, and Quelch's attempted murder of his wife cannot be regarded as anything less than an act of the basest and most despicable treachery in the light of what Irene can remember about it. She herself, she avers, was frightened ; and she crawled into the bushes to hide. She says that Quelch hunted for her for a long time, and she believes he meant to kill her also. Fortunately she had sufficient sense, or her childish instinct prompted her, to lie perfectly quiet until he abandoned his search and went away.

It is difficult for me to write of these incidents in cold blood—even after the lapse of so many years.



## CHAPTER XXVI

ADELA did not die. She preferred to continue existing, and for a bad Michael gave us a good Henry Quelch. But *he* was born some months after the events touched upon in my last chapter. I refer to Henry, the father of Julius. He was killed in the hunting field in the summer of "48," and with him Julius' elder brother—poor fellow. Up to the present the Quelches appear to be an unlucky family, although the name still exists in the person of Julius, and I have a feeling that their luck must turn some day. But enough of the Quelches for the moment; I prefer to talk about Peter Ommundsen.

Present-day readers can hardly imagine what a godsend Peter was at this time. The youngest of ten brothers, he had spent twenty-three chequered years in various parts of the Old World, and added quite a little stock of practical knowledge to his own native ability. Moreover, he was a blacksmith and very expert as a mechanic.

I was rather surprised—as might be expected—when he informed me about this last accomplishment; but he cleared the matter up by explaining that his father had been more blessed in the matter of sons than financial supremacy. More-

over, so he said, the Ommundsen family was noted for the thickness of the family skull. For these reasons Ommundsen's father had given each of them the best start in life he could afford—he appears to have had plenty of influence despite the lack of cash—and as an additional safeguard he had caused each of them to be taught a trade. "Thus," he said, "when you, my sons, my thick-headed sons, get turned out of the professions I have found for you—as you will be—I shall perhaps be spared the additional humiliation of seeing you all in jail for highway robbery." Whereat he cursed them in turn and cast them forth. Such is Peter's version of the matter.

As a matter of fact I consider Peter a far better metalworker than Henry Mactavish. He it was who made the clock which adorns the wall of this room—it was a present to Marjorie on the occasion of our Silver Wedding—and I defy Henry to imitate it. Peter should not be taken at his own estimate.

After several attempts he also made, and tempered, two very excellent razors, and a machete which still evokes the grudging praise of Henry. Henry swears that these feats were more to the credit of the Blind Goddess than Ommundsen. "The ore has gone off," he said to me a few days ago, "an' the charkle is no whut it used t' bee, wi' they Seppings deevils neglectin' the puts," but when I told Peter he merely smiled. He then went and leaned against the door of the foundry whilst Henry was at work and waved his finger to

and fro in imitation of a pendulum. I thought Mactavish was going to have an apoplectic seizure—so great was his fury—but he refused the challenge, although he came to my house and examined *the* clock, both long and earnestly.

Confound it all! What a prolix old brute I am getting to be. I shall limp back, on the shoulder of Julius Quelch, to the subject of his elemental grandsire.

The harvest in the year 9 was a good one, and the lurking Michael did not set fire to the crops as I rather fancied he might do. Adela was convalescent by this time, and for once in her strenuous life was content to sit among the children and let seven-year-old Bill pretend to fill her place. It was at the end of one of these long hot days in the field that she opened up on the subject of her erring husband.

"Thorpe," she said, "do you think I could learn to use a bow?"

"Bow, Adela?" I laughed. "If Marjorie has corrupted *you* also I'd better chuck up the sponge altogether. You're worse than a brace of suffragists."

"It's not for hunting I want it," said Adela. "I just want to put about two foot of ashplant into Mike if I find him around any of these bright days."

"Vindictive devil! Surely the man's punished enough—alone in the forest with not even a dog for companionship. Hang it all, Adela! You can take it from me that when

Quelch shows up again it'll be a pretty meek Michael."

"And you can take it from me," snapped Adela, "that he means more mischief! It's bad enough as it is—his spoiling everything. But, Thorpe, Thorpe, I just love this valley"—her voice broke—"my home—the only home I ever had——"

"He'll come back to you," I said—I was rather distressed at this sudden outbreak—"It'll be all right, Adela. It——"

"Oh, *damn* you!" exploded Adela. "Who's talking about Mike? I hope he's dead. It's my *home* I'm afraid for—Miss Marjorie and the children and the garden and the cows and the pigs and all the rest of it—can't you *see*?"

I was puzzled. "He can't hurt us," I said finally. "He can't shoot, for one thing."

"I know it," sneered Adela. "If you aren't the biggest fool. How about those spears?"

"He had no spears with him when he bolted," I said confidently. I remembered that he had indeed started a javelin-casting game of his own about the time I left on my trip, but his performances had not augured well for the future of the art. "He couldn't use 'em if he had 'em," I added.

"Forget it!" said Adela—I think she must have learned this expression from Marjorie—"He's practised hard all the winter, and if I hadn't been a fool I ought to have guessed what he was up to. I'd feel easier now if I only knew

where the blasted spears were. He made about a dozen altogether."

"Where did he keep them?" I asked. This was looking a little more serious.

"Just what *I* want to know," said Adela. "I'd noticed he'd go out with three and come back with two, and I spoke to him about it. He said he lost the others, and I believed him. Upon my word, Thorpe, I believe I'm near as big an ass as yourself. He's been hidin' them—that's what *he's* done."

This news now looked *more* than a little serious. By questioning Adela further I unearthed the information that Quelch practised, by preference, down the river. The most logical conclusion was that there he had buried his spears; and I therefore decided to start at once to hunt for their hiding-place. The chances were that he had recovered them already, but I hoped for the best; so I set out at daybreak of the following day.

It seemed to me, as I hunted down the sea-shore trail with a carefully observant eye for "signs," that Quelch was going to become a first-class nuisance. If Adela's suspicions were correct the cliff top—long our strongest line of defence—now became our greatest peril. Even Adela's house was within range, and the buildings in Limestone Hollow would be quite untenable. I cursed a bit at the thought.

As might be expected, there were various faint tracks off the main footpath, but my eye was

finally caught by one more marked, which ran through long grass and therefore had obviously been worn quite recently. It was no deer track, for the hoof marks of deer are unmistakable, and it was too narrow to have been trodden out by a bear. I concluded that Michael had been stupid enough not to hide his tracks, and I accordingly followed it up.

Half a mile further on my prognosis was confirmed. The trail slid over the high clay bank of the river, in the side of which bank Michael had beaten out footholds for himself. Further examination revealed the half of a broken button and the print of a naked foot. It looked uncommonly likely that he had been accustomed to undress himself hereabouts and swim the river with his sandals in his teeth.

So far so good. I promptly made a bundle of my weapons, which I lashed sparwise across the top of my head and slid into the stream. By keeping on an apparent bee-line for the opposite shore—and at the same time letting the current carry me down stream—I landed on the self-same fallen tree utilised by his lordship. I noted where he had broken a branch which had impeded him, and I congratulated myself on my superior cunning.

Then I looked over the turf-clogged roots—it was a big beech, if I remember aright—and behold I was too late. A new-dug furrow in the loose earth below showed where the spears had lain—and the digging was so recent that, even as



I gazed, a small clod detached itself to roll from top to bottom—but the weapons themselves had been removed.

“In which case,” I said, musing aloud, “the disagreeable Michael is not far off.”

I looked out across the glade—the forest comes down to the river at this point—and then ducked with extreme agility. Right athwart the patch of atmosphere previously occupied by my head floated one of the missing spears, and out into the open gambolled the missing Michael. I did not wait to regret that my bow was still lashed across my skull, but slid promptly down the inclined trunk into the water. I had time to kick off a stroke or two from the landing-place before the enemy’s head appeared above the beech’s root.

“’Ullo!” said Quelch, and seemed at a loss for further conversation.

I swam a leisurely stroke or two more—on my back.

“Why did you do that?” I demanded sternly.

“I—I—because—w’y—’Ere!” he cried, suddenly remembering that he was upper dog at the moment. “’Ere! You come back!”

“Why should I come back? I want my clothes.”

The unfortunate Quelch still appeared incapable of seizing his advantage. With as much dignity as I could assume under the circumstances—and a power of secret terror—I steadily increased the distance between us. “Here is your spear,” I called. “Do you want it?”



"I want to talk to you," shouted Quelch. "I——" suddenly it dawned upon him that he had been bluffed, and with an indignant yell he let fly a second shot. I had an anxious moment, but managed to parry it with the spear which I had picked up. I did not waste time with further conversation, now that the spell was broken, but turned over and started on a strong trudgeon stroke for the opposite bank. "If you're man enough," I called, "why don't you follow me into the water?"

I imagine that last happy thought saved my life—but then even a stupid man does get quite brilliant under the influence of the fear of death. I heard Quelch drop his other weapons and draw his knife. It was not until he had run out to the end of the tree that he realised what an ass he was. I was morally certain to reach the shore at least twenty yards ahead of him, whereby our relative positions would automatically readjust themselves. "Come along, Michael," I mocked. "The water is quite pleasantly warm."

The incoming tide had checked the current—I was far enough down stream to feel its influence—so I landed only a matter of a hundred yards below the point where I had left my clothes. Quelch followed me along the other bank, shaking his beastly spears at me.

"Yer think yer bloomin' smart," he shrilled; "but you mark my words, *Mister* bloomin' Thorpe, I'll get yer! *By* ——, I'll get yer! An' you kin tell yer Bulgarian pal I'll get 'im too."

Now it is a strange thing. I had firmly intended to parley with Quelch. I wanted to give him all the chance possible, for after all there were only three men—to our knowledge—in the known world, and there should have been room for us. Just as I was opening my mouth to speak, however, a picture of his recent handiwork—up the brook—seemed to flash up into realistic colour before me. Mechanically I strung my bow.

“Quelch,” I called softly across the water.

Quelch turned his head, and next moment rolled shrieking and bubbling on the turf. The arrow had struck him full in the mouth, piercing his cheek and, feathers and all, had passed clean out below his right ear. I drew a strong bow in those days.

It was useless trying to cross the river again whilst he yet lay in wait for me, so I reluctantly turned back. I was still shaking with the savage rage which had gripped me so suddenly, and I gloated on the harm I had done. Half-way home it occurred to me that with all the training of an age-old civilisation behind me I had behaved just as one would expect any other primitive savage to behave in like case.

Then I felt very small and ashamed of myself.

## CHAPTER XXVII

AS might be expected, my reception in Limestone Hollow was the reverse of enthusiastic when I explained where I had been and what I had done. Marjorie called me a barbarian, and she dwelt heavily on the undeniable fact that I had now made it morally certain Quelch would attempt to even up the score by inflicting some damage on *us*. Peter reproved me on different grounds, but with equal severity. He said it was a rotten piece of mismanagement: "Vy you nod shood heem in de stomak?" Adela, indeed, was the only person who seemed disposed to take my part.

Anyhow, the deed was done. I can only plead that the memory of Adela's wounds and Irene crouching in fear in the forest upset my equilibrium at the moment. Although I had been silly enough to stoop to revenge—wherein is no real satisfaction outside the imagination of fools—bucketsful of repentant tears would not suffice to deaden the swing of the devil's pendulum. The play was again up to Quelch.

His first move was to quit the neighbourhood altogether. We hunted for traces of him for over a month without success. During all this period we were under the irksome necessity of keeping watch at night, which cut into our rest and

hindered our work. I was divided between violent rage at my own stupidity and a dumb irritation that three men could not exist on the same planet without waging war. We were always on tenterhooks as to the safety of our sheep, our carefully cultivated and unreplaceable fruit trees and the defences of Limestone Hollow, damage to any one of which things would have hit us hard.

Still time slipped by and the enemy made no move. I began to hope he had really left us for good, or had, perhaps, been waylaid by a hungry bear. Many a dawning I looked across the misty landscape for traces of smoke, or strained my eyes in the gloom for the glint of a camp fire in the forest, but without success. If he still haunted our settlement he had learned to hide his abode. Being Autumn the forest would be well stocked with wild fruits, and in the end I came to the conclusion that the man was too scared to attack.

I finally decided to keep on mounting guard until the first hard frost set in. If that did not drive him in, why then, we could reckon him dead, poor devil.

The rather hot and dry summer of Marjorie-land came to an abrupt end on September 28, and from then on until October 3 we had chilly breezes from the north, with occasional rain. The crab apples and the nuts were still on the trees, however, so we divided the lengthening nights into four-hour watches, and continued our steady

patrolling of the enclosure. In December the frost set in, about a month too soon, and on the heels of a heavy snowstorm. By Christmas Day we had decided that attack was out of the question. Quelch was dead, or had fled southwards to avoid the cold.

I returned to Limestone Hollow, and Peter had the run of the lower house. Adela, soon to be the mother of a more suitable Quelch than Michael of that ilk, had moved up with us; and I gave over the house to the women and the children. I had a pet wolf called Lupus—his name was Lupus for he was a wolf—and Lupus and I went to live together in the kitchen. I thought that perhaps this would make Lupus tamer than ever.

It was an extraordinary winter all round. On New Year's Day the frost broke, and January was as mild as butter. By February 2 we had forgotten Quelch, for we were all far more interested in Adela's little boy, whose birthday fell on the last-mentioned date. I remember that Peter and I had a violent quarrel as to who should stand godfather. Peter might have stood a better chance had not Adela taken rather an antipathy to him at that time for some unknown reason. Perhaps it was the shadow of coming events. Peter acquired what was vulgarly known as a "thick ear" in the Old World in the course of the next summer. He wanted to marry Adela—who was at least ten years his senior—and I fancy she gave him the adornment mentioned to

encourage him to adopt gentler methods. Peter never married Adela.

Pshaw! That was next Summer. I am supposed to be dealing with the events of February, "9."

On the night of the tenth of that month I had turned in at nine o'clock, having sat up an hour later than usual kneading buckskin. At midnight I was awakened by Adela's baby howling, and thereafter I found the desire for sleep had left me. I rolled over on my other side and noticed that the moon was still shining. The white beams were pencilling the earth floor through the chinks in the rough wickerwork door of the kitchen. I drew the pile of dressed skins which served me as blankets more tightly round my shoulders, for there was more than a touch of frost in the air, and I lay wondering how I should feel were I suddenly transported back to bedsteads and spring mattresses. Deucedly uncomfortable, I imagine.

A chip of burnt wood fell with a little click among the embers and a cricket—what mysterious affinity drew the crickets to our firesides before all the other animals of Marjorieland?—chirruped sleepily. I expected it was "Ferdinand," the chap who had lost his off hind skipper in the wars.

The howls of Henry ceased abruptly, and now I could hear the voices of Marjorie and Adela in low-pitched consultation. "Ferdinand," I said, "what the dooce is that noise?"



“Chereep! Chereep!” cried Ferdinand.  
“Nothing at all! Just the women! Ain’t it cold? Chereep! Chereep!”

“I mean the bizzing noise, and—there it goes again!”

“Chereep! Chereep! That’s me!”

“Fiddlestickends!” I retorted. “No cricket could make a sound like that. It is quite possibly a torpid bee——”

“Chereep! Chereep!” “Bizzz—Thud!”

I sat up so suddenly that I almost tumbled slumbering Lupus into the fire, and frightened Ferdinand into precipitate retreat. “That,” I said, “was an arrow landing,” and my mind was hazy with vague surmises.

“Whisper! Whisper—Crack!” arose a new sound, but the night is so full of subdued noises that one is easily deceived. I remained leaning on one arm—loath to get out into the cold, though distinctly apprehensive—until a whiff of smoke assailed my nostrils. Then I felt aggrieved, for had I not been unlawfully disturbed by the buzz of a hybernating insect and the lighting of a fire to heat water for Henry Quelch? I tumbled back indignantly amongst the skins, and then Marjorie screamed.

Marjorie is not given to screaming, but when she does let go she makes a good job of it; and it means that my attendance is instantly and urgently required. I came out of the kitchen so rapidly that I brought the door along with me, and as I came a fiery spear trailed across the moon



and bit into the turf at my feet. Simultaneously I saw the fire which I had heard kindle and had smelt. I could not miss seeing it because it covered about a third of our thatched roof and was spreading rapidly.

Marjorie was beating on the inside of the door, and I noticed with a shock that it had been lashed with rawhide strips. I swept my machete through the knots and out tumbled Marjorie with a child under each arm. Simultaneously a thirty-pound rock came humming down upon us and kicked the cross-beam from a corner post. I heard Ommundsen shout below, and then there was a pause.

I looked over my shoulder and my eye fell upon the solid walls of the uncompleted new house. The lower story of rock and mortar was finished and the joists to support the floor of the upper—solid ten-inch sticks, rough-squared with an adze—were all in place. I had not yet started nailing down the floor boards, but they were all stacked in a corner ready, resting on the joists. This made an excellent protection from missiles from above, so without more ado I hustled everybody in under cover and shot back to save what I could from the burning house. I heard the sonorous "Hey! Ay com'!" of Peter in the ravine drowned in the clatter and thunder of a cascade of boulders, and I groaned. Marjorie pushed past me and dived into the smoke.

Fortunately the inner walls were in bad repair. What I could not cut I pushed down, and out

between the smoking doorposts streamed a steady current of movable property. I caught a glimpse of Marjorie—strangely like a busy little terrier digging in a rabbit hole—and then over I went in a choking swirl of wood smoke. I remember thinking that I was done for, and reaching for her ankle to drag her back to safety, before I was jerked into my senses by a torrent of icy water.

“Get back!” shouted Ommundsen, one side of his face pouring with blood. “Get you breat’—you tvo blown—get *water*!”

“By——!” he choked as I ran back from the spring with the dripping leather bucket he had thrust upon me. “By—— he clever pfeller! Ay pretty near’ cash by stones, but Ay lie flat by my belly. ‘Yump ofer me, you——!’ Ay say, an’ dey yump”—he slashed in the water where the fire glowed reddest—“More vater!” he broke off, and dived in after the spinning-wheel.

“All bud vun leedle vun—dey yump ofer me,” he repeated as I came back. “Ay taenk Ay loose starr-boar’ ear by heem—haw! haw!” Most things are a joke to Peter.

Just to lend us a hand with the good work Quelch pushed a couple more boulders over the edge. One of them slew all the guinea-pigs. “No good, Peter!” I cried. “The spring’s dry. Back into the new house.” Peter clapped Marjorie’s gold tub over his head and ran for it amidst a parting shower of spears. Our retreat was well covered; three arrows streaked upwards from the doorway as we crossed.

I could not avoid thinking of Marjorie's homily on barbarism as I joined her, and it made me laugh whilst I strung my own bow. But after all she was only defending her home. I did not get time to aid her in the work, because Quelch took the hint and bolted. We pursued as far as the head of the ravine, but he was out of sight when we got there.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

**B**EYOND the fright to the children, and the cut across Ommundsen's face, the damage inflicted by the "Battle of Limestone Hollow" was not so serious as I had feared. Marjorie groaned when she discovered that our one and only Bible had perished in the flames, but I chose to see something prophetic in this. Indeed, it appears to me nowadays as if we were to lose everything linking us to the Old World except tradition. Besides the loss of the Bible, a third part of "How to do Everything" was reduced to ashes; and the Original Axe was melted into a shapeless lump of iron. We also lost a loom—the first I had made, and the worst constructed of the two we possessed, fortunately—a table and a few other odds and ends.

What astonished me more than anything else was the deliberation and skill with which the attack had been planned and carried out. It appeared that Michael had piled about half a ton of rocks at the head of the ravine in such a manner that by kicking out a crowbar he could send the lot flying. All of these had passed over Ommundsen whilst he was climbing to our aid. In addition to this primitive battery Quelch had also torn down part of the upper stockade, so as to allow him to move freely between the cliff

top over the Hollow and the head of the ravine, and had lined the edge above us with more boulders, most of which he had carried some distance. He had been bringing up his ammunition for a week or two beforehand, and had concealed it in the nearest patch of bramble, as we discovered later.

Having completed all these preparations, he had crept down below, and had tied up the door of the house so as to imprison those within—he cannot have known that I was sleeping in the kitchen. The rest of his acts I have related.

Anyhow we had learned a lesson, and now knew for certain that Michael Quelch, our enemy, was no more the Quelch I had picked up under the tree than Adela Watkins, our friend, was the Adela who went ashore with Quelch in Constantinople.

This new edition of Adela, strange to say, now became quite unnatural in her hatred toward her outlaw husband. I had always imagined that no normal woman went back on her man—however unsavoury his record—but it appears I was mistaken. “I used to like him in a fashion,” said Adela. “It was on account of our journey together, I suppose, but he got too thick for me even; even before he tried to do for me—damn him.”

“Adela!” cried Marjorie, who is very particular about other people’s language. Adela grovelled in spirit.

“It was his tryin’ to kill the babies, Miss

Marjorie! His own child, too! He must ha' known! Can't anything be done?"

Marjorie's lips quivered, as it does when she is perplexed. "Jack!" she said, with that little whining intonation which means she has reached a dead-end and wants help. I looked at her, and I looked at Peter.

Peter nodded gravely. We all three understood without the necessity for superfluous talk; but it looked a horrid job somehow, with only three men in the world.

"Ve draw lot?" suggested Peter. "Or if you taenk he fight lak maan ven Ay cash heem—den Ay go anyway. If you taenk he hrnun, or vant me gif qvarter—den ve draw lot."

"You can't go, Peter," I said sadly. "You're not expert enough as a tracker for the job. It'll have to be me."

They saw the force of this, and it was accordingly agreed that I must hunt down and kill Quelch. Marjorie made rather a fuss about it but had to give in.

"You needn't go for a month yet," she remarked later. "He'll be on his guard at present; but if we wait he'll think we are afraid to follow him. Oh, doesn't it sound *devilish*? Why aren't there policemen and law courts and things?"

"There are," I said. "The man has been condemned by a jury of his fellow countrymen, and his sentence is by Act of Parliament. Besides, this is *war*, if you like to look at it that

way. The odds, if anything, are in favour of Quelch, since he is on the defensive——”

“Don’t go!” cried Marjorie. “I forbid you to go!”

“I would remind you that the Monarchy is Constitutional.”

“It’s not!” interrupted Marjorie.

“And I’ve *got* to go. We can’t alter our decisions in this offhand manner.”

“I wish,” said Marjorie, “nobody had ever come here except ourselves. It was fun then, but now it’s all spoiled.”

“It’s not spoiled, you ass. Don’t we still hunt together and work together and play together? Good heavens! Does the presence of Ommundsen and Adela make you feel crowded?”

“Ass yourself,” grumbled Marjorie. “You know it’s not that I mean—I—Oh, damn!—What’s the use of worrying? Say something soft now.”

And she put her insolent chin on my shoulder.

“I can’t do things in this cold-blooded manner, Marjorie,” I said. “It’s not seemly. You’re like the Chicago editor who wanted his staff of poets to punch the time clock and write poetry for eight hours a day——”

“Then why have you got your arm——?” Marjorie broke off in mid-sentence and closed her eyes in complacent expectancy.

“Force of habit,” I explained. The rest of my part of this conversation was drivel, so I will not repeat it. The spectacle of Old John



Thorpe making a fool of himself in the days of his early manhood is not a fit spectacle for a godless generation.

On a blustery day in March I undertook the grim duty set on me. I took the war path as I imagine the Cave Man did, in the clothes I stood in and my weapons. I did not carry food, for I meant to live entirely on what I could get, and my only extra covering was a light robe of guinea-pig skins which just served to keep me from freezing at night.

I was not alone, however. I made this trip the occasion of a notable experiment ; for I took Lupus. It was pretty long odds. I thought that he would bolt off and leave me as soon as we were past Upper Lake ; but one has to take chances sometimes, and he was wondrous friendly and docile for a wolf.

Rusty brown lay the dank remains of the bracken along the whispering brook, as savage man and savage wolf-dog trotted up the forest path. After a few miles the stream began to sing to itself, and I caught myself whistling the air. It ran :

“ Defer-r-r-r ! Defer-r-r-r !  
To the Lord High Executioner—”

I changed that air for another one—quickly.

We climbed the scarp above Deerford, and presently the forest fell back far ; rocks began to show ; and one could see the rolling downs like a misty green sea below. Trot

became a walk—most of the time—until a stag stood knee deep in heather and stamped its foot at me. I prepared to receive cavalry, but much to my surprise the stag ran away over the saddle-back beyond—toward Upper Lake. *That* looked as if it had personal experience of mankind; and I decided it would be more expedient to approach Upper Lake from the uphill side, by crossing the saddle, than to go round by the brook path. I didn't think Quelch would be in the hut, somehow, *but*—Lupus had rushed off after the stag. "There goeth Lupus," I said sadly, and came to the head of the divide alone. I took one glance at the stone hut, snug and intact in its encircling wall—even the turf roof intact—and then dropped; there was smoke coming from the chimney.

"Of all the cheek!" I gasped. "Well, Mr. Quelch, right or wrong, here goes to carry out orders!"

I propped myself cautiously on both elbows, and peered down between the heather tops. I could see a line or two set for trout, and presumably that meant Quelch was near enough to attend to any bites he got; for a trout does not wait one's pleasure in these matters. I shivered at the idea of killing a man in his house, not that it was *his* house in any real sense of the word—Marjorie and I built it by ourselves—but just an imaginative forecast of what the experience would be like. I did not intend to give him any more chance than God might ordain, for I had

lived in mortal fear all winter, being attached to my family in my own peculiar way. Seeing that Quelch did not emerge—if he were indeed inside—I got up and moved forward soft-footed.

Something caught ; and before I could recover my balance came the sound of a bowstring and a clumsily made quarrel birred by beneath my nose. “Spring Guns and Mantraps ! So Quelch had made him crossbows !” I plunged forward with all caution thrown to the winds, and out at the door rushed my elusive enemy. He shouted inarticulately, shook a spear at me, made a savagely indecent gesture, and cleared off out of bowshot before I could more than lay arrow to string.

I marked the direction he took, and dropped in for a hasty inspection of the hut’s interior.

He had not even scraped the skins for his bed ; and the bones of the animals he had devoured—Phew ! Yet this man was once civilised. I was glad to get out again into the fresh air, and take on after the active enemy. I found him already out of sight, and might have been in a quandary had not the wolf chosen to reappear at this moment. I don’t know how or when he came back, but I found him mysteriously at my heels—a witch-wolf, perhaps—and he seemed to understand that this was a great hunt we were prosecuting.

My eyesight supplementing Lupus’ nose we followed Quelch all that day, but never caught sight of him a second time. I wondered to find

what a good runner misfortune had made him ; and we made our disappointed camp high on the flank of the Black Mountain—the one you can see from the head of White Cow Ravine in clear weather.

Thereafter a week rolled by, and I was still on the heels of Michael. His tracks were easy enough to follow, except in the rocky places, and the wolf was more than helpful there—but still we had not seen him. Yet we kept him on the go, I imagine.

The country changed, and now we were crossing small plains alternating with oak forests.

The brooks and rivers ran southwards to the Seine at first, and then north-east to unknown outlets. I was almost in despair, and wondering how our quarry avoided the numerous animals that attacked us daily—and put us to flight as a rule—when the idiot chose to light a fire. It was in a forest, and I managed to get within speaking distance before he broke up camp and left his supper half cooked. A wave of pity swept me off my feet for the moment, and I shouted that his life was not forfeit—that I offered terms.

I heard him pause, and I halted under the shadow of a tree whilst he approached gingerly to the other side of the glade. The fire between us showed up his tattered deerskins, the scar on his cheek and his gap-toothed grin. Yet despite his appearance the thought shot across my mind that one of us was as much the product of civilisation as the other. Quelch was no more a real

Cave Man than I was. A Cave Man might have rejoiced in Quelch's filthy personal habits, but he would, at the least, have possessed some sort of moral code—not to mention a sound set of teeth. I should imagine that a decent Cave Man, once he had learned to wash, would be quite companionable in his rough way. But this—ye gods—was a pawnbroker's assistant gone wrong.

All I can say is, he didn't look it.

"If you throw down your arms and come with me, Michael," I said—I felt I was acting weakly—"you will be allowed to live on the Island, and we will visit you whenever possible. You can have all the animals you want for companionship, and—it is better than being a wild beast."

"Yes," said Quelch, and edged closer. He was still grinning—or rather leering—and I imagine he derived, in some strange way, a certain amount almost of pleasure from his outlawry. At the least it had brought a hidden fund of courage and self-reliance to the surface.

"I can't offer you more," I continued, "after the way you've behaved. Perhaps when my boys grow up——"

"Look behind you!" shrilled Quelch.

I half turned—one was always on the alert—but instinct kept the corner of an eye on Michael. Thus it came about that I dodged in time. I suppose he was so treacherous himself that he could not believe in my own good faith, poor devil. I thought of that later. At the moment I shot

once, swiftly, and Quelch fell crashing in the bush.

“I’ve done it!” I said, and ran forward.

Next thing I knew, I had the barb of a half-warded spear in my right thigh, and Michael was away like a startled deer. “You fool!” I cursed after him. “I’ll kill you for that!”

“I’ll kill *you*,” retorted Quelch.

Childish—very.

## CHAPTER XXIX

A WOUNDED man with a vindictive enemy in the immediate neighbourhood is in not very favourable plight; especially when placed in an unknown forest two hundred miles from home. I awoke unpleasantly to the understanding that our relative positions were reversed. Quelch was now the hunter—I the hunted.

I crept from the hollow tree where I had hidden myself, and limped stiffly westward in the dawn. I was chilled through, and my wound gave me a good deal of pain so that it was all I could do to cover perhaps seven miles in the day. Furthermore Lupus had chosen to continue hunting Quelch—who would probably finish him—lone-handed. I killed nothing that day; but I grubbed up a few edible roots.

At nightfall, weary and starved, I cursed bitterly that there were none of the easily captured guinea-pigs in this country. I had shot at a hare and missed—my sore thigh hampered me, for one lays all of one's body to the drawing of a bow—and I had lost one arrow in the hide of a wretched deer. Also I had passed a small herd of aurochs, but they seemed disposed to leave me alone—so I left them.

I managed to scramble into the lower branches



of a big oak, where I slept fitfully through another interminable cold night. In the morning my leg was badly swollen, and I had a touch of fever. The following evening the fever was worse, for every step had been agonising, and I was glad to lie down in the shelter of a bramble brake and pray for death. From here onwards my memory gets confused. I walked in a dull dream, out of which wild oxen came to stare at me curiously, and once, I think, a bear. Nobody seemed to want to kill a dying man, however, except perhaps the foxes who yapped round me at night. I suppose that I must have hid pretty carefully when not on the move, and that sabre-tooths did not hunt those grounds.

I distinctly recollect, nevertheless, *one* wild beast which was less forbearing. It capered and shouted, and threw spears at me—but I drove it away. Afterwards I seem to remember Lupus nosing at my hands, and I walked on crying—I always cry under the influence of great fatigue—and muttering some jumble about Marjorie and the children. But even if I wept on the road—what a strange booby the deer must have thought me!—I seem to have ever pressed westward; and always I walked with my strung bow before me, and an arrow on the string.

Then I woke up again for quite a long interval, and recklessly lit a fire around a bee tree. I didn't know whether Quelch would see the blaze or not, and I didn't much care. The fever swept over me again, and there is another blank.

I woke for the last time in a cool cavern in a limestone bluff.

I felt abominably weak, and there was no way of telling how long I had been in this place. I had a vague intuition, at the time, that it was nine or ten days since I had fought with Quelch in the forest, but I imagine now that three weeks would have been nearer the mark.

As to how I had lived, I would rather not go into details. Mercifully the larger part of my experiences are hidden from me. Somebody had left the half-eaten remains of a rabbit on the floor; but that might have been the wolf. He was sitting over against me with his chin on his paws, seemingly very perplexed, but fat and well fed. I looked at the raw carcase, and tried to imagine it as his work, but I fear the bones had been picked rather than gnawed.

There was also a lump of honeycomb—plus various defunct bees—in a hollow stone; and a few half-milled acorns lay on a flat slab. I seem to have reverted to my old tricks with those acorns—starting to do a job, and leaving it half finished. Anyhow, I appeared to be going to recover now, so I crawled to the entrance of the cave.

Below, a short swathe of brushwood divided the base of the cliff—which must be fifty feet from top to bottom—from a broad and rather sluggish river. Just beyond the brush, to the left, I could see the charred stump of the bee tree, and right against me on the opposite bank was a

curiously crooked oak whose appearance seemed strangely familiar. I thought heavily for a moment, and then remembered :

“ It yoost lak leetle maan vith hump—It yoost lak leetle maan vith hump ! ” Who had made that remark ? And when ? And where ?

“ Ay looken by dat tree,” I remarked to Lupus, “ an Ay taenk Ay see dat tree befor’. Ve brink lamps dis vay by de river down. Lupus, my child, this is undoubtedly the Seine, and come to think of it I even remember seeing this cave.”

Lupus wagged his tail.

“ It’s a curious coincidence,” I said. “ It’s what Adela might consider another miracle. You are not, I presume, a disciple of Haeckel, Lupus ? ”

Lupus grinned.

“ Go and get some firewood,” I said. “ I’m too weak to do it myself.”

He only looked silly, so in the end I *had* to crawl down. I slaked my intolerable thirst in the river, and filled my horn for future use. I gathered dry sticks, and springy twigs enough for a bed of sorts and some firewood. In spite of my exertions I felt pretty jolly as I rolled myself up in my robe. I winked at Lupus.

“ I wonder,” I said, “ if I shot all those animals I’ve consumed on this trip, or if you brought them to me. You *must* be a witch-wolf, Lupus, but you are nevertheless a credit to your up-bringing.”

Thereafter I slept properly for a long time, and

woke up feeling pretty fresh, although weak, and with a fairly well advanced appetite. I cooked the mutilated remains of the rabbit, and Lupus watched me carefully. Presently he shot off down the bank, to return with another—a fat buck. I thought he would, perhaps, cook it now that he had caught it—for I saw that he was indeed a witch-wolf—but he only left it on the floor. To think that his grandfather was taken in the attempt to wolf me !

I am a wiry little devil. In a week I was almost as fat as ever—although fresh meat, acorn meal, and stale honey was my only diet. Once or twice a strange wolf called and held vivid conversation with Lupus, which made me imagine we might have usurped his den—the back of the cave made it look as if we had. The last time he came I shot him, and the witch-wolf thought this a frantic joke, judging by his waggles and grins, his blithe wriggings and his laughter. Yea ! He laughed—silently but with every tooth a gleam. I killed the stranger wolf ; and when we had rested sufficiently we left the cave.

I looked north, south, east and west, for sign of Quelch, but finding a smokeless horizon I rolled my robe and made off downstream on my way home. I camped near a cairn of rocks where pebbles had been beaten into the turf to form letters. The sign was “MLD 4 days.” “That means two on the river, and two north,” I said. “I wonder if we could cut a corner.”

“Why not explore the river to the mouth ? ”

said the witch-wolf Lupus.\* "It can't be far; and they probably think we're dead anyway."

"But I don't *want* Marjorie to think I'm dead," I said fiercely. "It makes her miserable. I want to disillusion her on that point till she feels inclined to kill me herself—she comes pretty close to that if you rag her too much—Marjorie."

"Knowledge," grunted Lupus, "benefits your children. Explore!"

"Very well, then!" I said. I had no fear but that Peter and Adela were enough to make Quelch steer clear of the settlement; and it seemed there was wolf-sense in Lupus' remark.

So we explored until we came to the estuary of the Seine. It is about five days south-west of here, and mostly grassy country where the cattle range. I went as far as the cairn, which was still there a year ago when the ship looked in. I was attracted to the spot by a crowd of gulls, and when I got there, expecting to find a stranded whale, I found instead the dead body of Michael Quelch.

There was no mark on the body that I could see, so I do not know how he had come by his death. Perhaps he got poisoned. Anyhow he had passed and there was the end of him. I built the cairn above his remains and turned inland for home.

I got home finally at midday on the twenty-

\* For the express information of Henry Mactavish, I would mention that Lupus said this with his *eyes*. He was taciturn by nature. Would that others were like him.—J. T.

ninth of April, 9. That meant I had been absent very nearly fifty days ; and they had all given me up for lost, except Marjorie. As I explained to that lady, there was a certain charm about these periodic scares. She was as affectionate as a leopard which has not been fed for two weeks might be toward a beefsteak.

Somewhat in the same style too—Marjorie was always a violent person, though you'd never think it to look at her—but then, we were like no other pair that ever existed to my knowledge. Readers must try to imagine how it would be if all the world except Joan or Bill, or Irene or Henry or Gladys or Jim were exterminated. A year we abode in Limestone Meadow by ourselves, and seven years thereafter with but two other people to keep us company. The result was that one laboured under the impression that the sun rose and set for the especial benefit of Marjorie. Nobody was so lovable as Marjorie, ever ; nobody was ever such a quarrelsome beast. I have got my mind stuck in this groove, and Marjorie has returned the compliment with interest, so far as I can see. And as she is everything to me, and has grown so much a part of me, I seem to remember strange past things and look forward to stranger things in the future. I think—I almost know—that we must both be nearing the end of some long journey, of which we have forgotten the beginning—it was so long ago. When it is ended, however, perhaps one will remember all and the memory should be amusing. I imagine, for



instance, times when Marjorie has been allowed to have her own way entirely and has insisted on marrying people like Crawley, with two lives at least turned to gall and bitterness as a result—if not three. Perhaps I have been as bad, or worse, in my own time; yet Time rolls on and the evil passes—only the good remains.

Now I see that I am running counter to the opinions of certain sentimentalists of the Old World whose cry—or rather whose whine—is “this love or that love is the perfect love.” I am quite well aware that such a phrase as “passing the love of women” has indeed been in existence for many thousand years, but would these people have me to understand that the real love toward one’s own wife is nothing? Do they say, “passing the love of women,” in the sense that one might say, “very long—immense—longer than my thumb nail?” I would point out that I am not discussing perfect love. I am discussing another matter which is in a class by itself, although as essential as, say, food and drink—the natural love of one’s real, ordained helpmeet. I say that this thing is an essential thing; and to claim you can drown it or replace it with this or that is rot—damned rot!—that is what it is! Find your love or lose your love—there’s only one *real* love for you. You cannot replace this thing any more than you can the natural habit of breathing air. You can twist it and pervert it, and make yourself a diseased, unnatural creature thereby; but you cannot replace it. Sooner or



later, an' you would win to Heaven, you must go back and find that girl and bring her along as you were intended to do. I like to believe that in the end one has a perfect stroke of luck, and the understanding becomes as perfect as ours has been in this lifetime; I feel sure I have adored Marjorie since she was a hoyden in Babylon and I was her pre-Christian slave; and I am not an "osophist" of any description; I am just Old John Thorpe.

## CHAPTER XXX

**T**O return.

When Marjorie had finished describing me as her dear, dear, she drifted by a natural progression to an outpouring of abuse that might well have dislocated the gall of a livery drill sergeant. I forget her exact grievance, but imagine it was because I had frightened her and it was too much trouble for her to weigh my actual guilt in the matter. When she had talked herself dry I was allowed to inform them all as to what had happened.

Adela, strangely enough, burst into tears at the news, but I think we all felt relieved that Quelch had fallen by Act of God and not by my hand. In any case, we could not help feeling that a heavy cloud had lifted from our sky.

Therefore we went forth very cheerfully the following morning to conduct an important test.

I have mentioned our ox-cart, I believe. Well, this cart had strange wheels not unlike barrel ends, which worked on a wooden axle, and fell to pieces at the slightest encouragement. I had grown ambitious, however, with the arrival of Peter, and a part of the winter had been devoted to spokeshaving out proper wheels, hubs, spokes and felloes, whilst Peter forged an iron axle-tree and cunningly devised bolts—not screw-

bolts, of course—to fasten it to the cart. I had left him with his part of the job half finished, but now everything was ready for the trial trip.

“Ve fix dem now,” said Peter, “an’ fetch load from mine, for Ay haf yoose vat is by pforge. Ve fill cart pfull now. Dese akkle neffer brak in hoondred year.” So we yoked up the oxen and they immediately stampeded.

“Vait !” howled Peter, hopping like a delirious monkey whilst Adela and I fought at the nose ropes. “Vait, you great vite cows vile Ay *greese* dem ! Den, py Yiminy, you taenk you hride bicycle.” He flapped on a handful of tallow on either side, the oxen snorted and we were off, the cart bounding like a war chariot, and Adela and myself still fluttering at the excited beasts’ heads.

Marjorie, of course, had managed to get on board, and was at the moment performing fantastic feats with a stock whip—how she maintained her balance I cannot say. Peter, of course, had managed to get left behind, and followed like foot-feathered Mercury in the dust of our tempestuous passage. Sometimes he roared with laughter and sometimes he cursed the loss of one of his sandals, but ever before him flitted the crashing cart and the whip licking back and forth like the arm of a stranded octopus.

We came to an abrupt halt by running full tilt into the western abattis. I fielded Marjorie neatly as she slid forth over the rump of the near ox, but I think he only missed kicking us both

to pieces for that he was preoccupied in the attempt to gore his yoke-mate.

Adela and Peter unjustly claimed that the narrowly-averted disaster was our fault, and they would not allow us to have anything more to do with the oxen, so we accepted the situation, and flirted along behind the outfit as far as the mine. As the others were so keen on the job, we let them do the filling up as well—Peter was young and lusty and a little spadework would not come amiss to him. It seemed a glorious thing that our cart would no longer loosen every tooth within earshot by the dint of the music of its passage. Marjorie and I went over to the river to see if there were fish.

“Hi!” shouted Adela presently. “How about that salt?”

“Bother!” said Marjorie, “I forgot that. Peter and I were boiling salt the other day and I expect it’s dry by now. Suppose we’ll have to go and get it.”

She looked mournfully down the path to the sea. It was a very warm day, and I saw she was thinking hard.

“It must be done,” said Marjorie finally, and on that word began to limp. She travelled about a fathom towards the ox-cart and sat down.

“I’m afraid I’ve sprained my ankle,” she said firmly. “Put me on the cart, and I will go home to my babies. I put her on the cart and I kissed the sprain—it is the only treatment necessary for this class of injury when Marjorie develops

it on a hot day under the influence of more work on the horizon. Adela looked at her sourly, but Marjorie's face was too appealing for the older woman's ill-temper to last. "I'll manage them well enough with this big load to keep 'em quiet," said Adela. "Do you and Ommundsen go on for the salt. Oh, *you!*" She shook my erring wife furiously, and that potentate grinned. While they went round the bend of the cliff Marjorie was still sitting on a leathern apron which covered the load of hematite, and Adela was walking by her cattle's heads.

As we went on down to the sea Peter informed me of a smudge of smoke seen on the horizon during their last trip to the salt cave. I suggested a forest fire on the opposite shore, but he said it had appeared further out toward the island, and had only lasted for a minute or two.

"Perhaps it was a steamer," I suggested, laughing; but my private opinion inclines toward a spouting whale. "There goes one of 'em now!"

It was a gorgeous spring day, with a bright sun and a gentle, southerly breeze rippling the blue water. The wallowing monster in the foreground added just the touch of wildness to the sea which, coupled with the long rake of desolate coast and the distant hills and black forest to the north, made everything doubly attractive to my mind.

However, we had two busy hours before us, and Marjorie's sudden lameness will perhaps become more understandable when I explain that

we dried out our salt in those days in metal pots. Some of these were of gold and needed no attention, but the gold pocket had rather given out and we had to add two vessels of iron to the appliances. These, of course, called for very careful treatment. We had to dry them, scrub them well with sand, and lard them well with fish oil until next time—and even then they rusted. We emerged finally from the cave with a fixed determination to bathe.

It was high tide, so we stripped our dirty, working buckskins and left them, with our machetes, among the rocks. We found a good pulpit, and from here we were able to dive into deep water. Peter swore he saw a lobster among the seaweed, and we spent some time on a foolish attempt to capture it with a crooked stick. We continued to amuse ourselves in this manner until I realised that I was going to catch it hot on my return, Marjorie setting her face sternly against idleness in me.

“Peter,” I said firmly, “it is time to go back.”

“Vat? An’ be maad vork in garten? Ay staay heer aal daay.”

“You may,” I said, “but I daren’t. Marjorie—Peter! Look!”

The defiant Peter immediately looked in the wrong direction—inland. In spite of his brave words I think he expected either Marjorie or Adela, because his conscience was not bright. “Vile ve haf no cloes dey cannot com’ neer,” he muttered. “It vas you say ve go baathe!”

“It’s not that, you poltroon !” I cried. “Look out to sea !”

“Ay see not’ing.”

“About four points off the island, then.”

“Sqvall ! No ! Yumpin’ Yehosapat ! Saail !”

We scrambled up on the largest rock available, and I wonder what wild ideas chased one another through Peter’s head. My own were sufficiently strange, in all conscience ; and I was more than a little frightened. I had a dreadful feeling that I was going to wake up on the cliffs at Poltyack to find the last eight years had been a vivid dream, no more. Just a summer dream ; and only Aunt Wilhelmina’s dwindling legacy between me and the end. I shut my eyes several times and opened them with a jerk. I pinched myself. I looked at my callous hands and feet. I did everything possible to hurry the dread awakening if it had to come ; and finally I discovered myself drawing comfort from the thought that perhaps Marjorie’s engagement to Crawley was illusion also. Then I smote myself very hard on my foolish head.

“Vy you do dat ?” said Peter.

“Oh ! You’re still there, are you ?” I abruptly realised what I was saying and felt awkward.

“Ay know !” cried Peter triumphantly. “You taenk you vake up ? Ay pfeel saame vay too ! Do not vake, Yon T’orpe, do not vake ! Firs’ ve see vat is by dis boat.”

So fixed was I in my dream theory that I was



rapidly imagining myself into the correct sensations for the occasion. "Do not vake, Yon T'orpe, do not vake!" echoed the words in the deep caverns of my mind. I shook my head furiously. "I must!" I said. "It is a serious matter—it——"

Peter is a man of quick sympathies. He read the anguish in my face. "It iss no dream," he said gently. "De boat com'—Yon—look at boat, andt be not pfool."

"Thank you, Peter." I blushed and looked at the boat, very wideawake. It was getting nearer and the unfamiliar familiarity of it—the incongruity of it on that whale-harbouring sea—more distinct. A gust came, and it heeled a little. "A cutter!" I remarked.

"Yawl," corrected Peter. "Ay see dat yigger saail aft."

There was a longish pause, and then——

"Ay see man," said Peter.

He took off his wide-brimmed straw hat—the only garment he had on—and he waved it. From the deck of the little white vessel a cloth fluttered, and by straining my eyes to the uttermost I imagined I could make out the heads of several people. She was coming up rapidly along the coast, with the wind on her starboard quarter and the slant of her deck made it hard to see who was aboard. One man was certainly standing by the rigging, and he it was who waved the handkerchief. The rest—if there were others—would be below, or in the cockpit aft of the saloon. I

made a correct guess at the vessel's displacement ; she would be about fifteen tons.

She altered her course slightly, the main sheet came in, and she stood more directly toward us with the wind abeam. As if the manœuvre had terrified him, Peter gave a yell of horror and dropped.

"What is it ?" I cried in alarm. "Do you think—— ?"

"Ay see," cried Peter, now coursing swiftly across the rocks. "Ay taenk Ay see vomans. Ay blush. How ve know dey not got spy-glass."

I joined him. We were both fine-looking fellows, but the thought was disturbing nevertheless. The lacing of our leather shirts slipped in our trembling fingers, so that by the time we returned in more seemly guise the boat was close enough to distinguish individuals.

"T'ree !" cried Peter. "No, four. Man by hrigging vear grey tweed suit—vait !"

A splotch of red broke out at the peak. The wind fluttered it so that it was hard to distinguish the blazon of her nation. "Norsk ?" said Peter hopefully, and then the ensign stood flat as a board for one fleeting second.

"P'ff !" grunted Peter. "Engelsk——"

"I'm sorry, Peter."

"Nev' min'. Maybe Ay get use taalk you goddam langvich by'mbye." He laughed. "He hael," he added.

We answered the hail. "Ship ahoy !" I

shouted, and the cry went forth for the first time across those waters. "What ship's that?"

"Hanged if *I* know," echoed a faint and perplexed voice from out the sun-flecked offing.

Light broke upon my troubled mind, and I sat down to laugh. "Peter," I said, "it's some more of the Hubble-Bubble's work. Poor beggars!"

We waited while she drew closer, and presently up she ran into the wind within bowshot of us. "Where can we find a sheltered anchorage?" roared the man in the grey tweeds. He had a great big voice, but he was a big, broad-shouldered fellow. I liked the ring of the voice. There were also, in the cockpit, a man at the tiller, two girls and a grown woman, all staring at us. A youth of about seventeen or eighteen was busy with the jib sheets. I could see no other people.

I advised them to keep on up the coast to the mouth of the river, hugging the shore on the hitherward side on account of the shoals to the north-east. We were so wrought up that we never waited to see her get under way again, but sped off toward the trysting cove at a pace which might well have pumped Elijah the Tishbite. Nevertheless she got there first, and was riding at anchor when we broke forth on the beach. It was stranger than I can describe to see her there—a twentieth-century sailing yacht with wire rigging and bobstay and polished brass cleats twinkling in the sunlight, lifting to

the ripple of our unexplored and unexploited sea.

A dinghy splashed overboard and the boy I had previously noticed in the bows slipped into her and took the oars. The grey tweed man lowered his heavy body into the stern with surprising dexterity, seized the yoke lines and rasped out an order. Immediately protruded a flaming head from the cabin, and an imaginary cap was touched to an all but non-existent quarter-deck as an even larger man flowed forth. This person was quaintly clad in a blue serge shirt and hairy deerskin breeches of uneven length. He handed a letter to the commander, stroked his long, gingery moustache, and gazed dreamily at us across the water.

"Tumble in!" snapped the grey tweed man. "Deker will stand by with the gun in case of accidents."

"Ah'll just tak' ma axe," announced Deerskins, and dropped leisurely backwards down the companion again. The commander of the expedition appeared vexed.

"Ah'm no ower confident but there'll be a display o' hosteelity," continued Robinson Crusoe, as he returned with a strange weapon of gleaming bronze, which he twirled lightly in one hand, although the blade looked to weigh a good fourteen pounds. "Whyfor has yon wee felly brocht his bow an' arrows?"

"E—e—e—h! An' luik at the muckle dirk, wull ye? Yon's shairly a ferocious weepo—"

Grey Tweeds gave an inarticulate howl. Simultaneously the three ladies of the party clapped their hands over their ears as, complacently breasting a torrent of oaths, Deerskins slowly inserted one semi-nude limb into the bows of the dinghy. Half way down he paused to shake his axe at us : " Ho ! ho ! " he barked.

" Ha ! ha ! " cried Peter, and waved his " muckle dirk " in defiance. This caused quite a sensation ; and Grey Tweeds leaned outboard sideways, scrutinising us through half shut eyes. " Here you," he shouted, " you're an Englishman, aren't you ? "

" I used to be," I assured him. " Is this an invasion or a friendly visit ? for we'd like to be prepared."

" Hah ! " cried Tweeds, in a relieved voice, " drop that axe, Mactavish, and sit down. Give way, Galloway."

The dinghy drove, chuckling, across the waters of the cove, to ground, with a grating of shingle, just below us. Instantly Mactavish's enormous feet spurned the gravel as he sprang to shore, his headman's chopper flung back over the right shoulder, ready to remove seven heads with one blow.

" Qvick ! " shouted Peter, " ve steal hees fancy britches befor' he escap' ! Wurr—ooo ! " He waggled his machete suggestively and advanced, crouching, in imitation of the valiant Mactavish. The puzzled oarsman caught my eye and grinned.

" It's all right," he said plaintively. " Fact of

the matter is, you know, every bally living thing we've met so far has put up a fight, so how were we to know what *you* would do? We'd be glad to know where we are, by the way."

The commander came ashore as Mactavish lowered his weapon. "Can you tell us whether a man called Thorpe lives here?" he inquired stiffly.

"He does," I said. "Is that my mail you have?"

"Hah!" repeated Tweeds. "So you're John Thorpe, are you?" He seemed to be considering the advisability of damning my eyes. "You expected us apparently?" he grunted.

"I did not, sir. I neither expected you, nor have I the foggiest idea as to who you may be. But I'll venture a guess you came at the instigation of a long-necked lunatic with a fiddle."

Tweeds' jaw dropped. "Hah!" he cried. "By Jove! Galloway! By Jove! What?"

"By Jove!" said Galloway in a respectful tone. Mactavish and Peter were walking round one another as friendly as a newly introduced brace of Aberdeens. I could almost see the hair rising on their backs. Tweeds cocked his head on one side again, and again narrowed his eyes.

"My name's Seppings," he informed me finally. "I—ah—hum!—Captain Seppings—hum—least—used—to be—what? Galloway?"

"Sir?" said Galloway, who in spite of burst shoes and strangely patched and darned clothing



yet bore traces of "gun room" origin. Captain—er—hum—Seppings, *and* a freckle-faced midshipman! I began to wonder if the Hubble-Bubble had scuttled a battleship. "Sir?"

"Carry on," ordered the Captain.

"You see, it's this way," began Galloway eagerly. "We're all at sea—that is to say we don't exactly know where we are. We—I say—haven't I seen you before?"

"Haven't I seen *you* before, Mr. Galloway? Your face seems strangely familiar."

Galloway coughed nervously. "I—er—er—probably you have, you know—I——"

"You see, I'm *Mull* and Galloway," he explained desperately. "At least I *was* Mull and Galloway, before the—er—the accident. But you see the—the rank——"

Even Peter paused in his reconnaissance of the bold Mactavish, and all eyes were fixed on the blushing youth. I caught myself whistling, and Peter—who only came to us the year before, be it remembered—suddenly clicked his heels and saluted.

"Galloway" returned the salute mechanically. "I wish you wouldn't," he implored. "I was always given to understand that—that these things didn't apply in Heaven, and the—the other hypothesis—rather frightful for the ladies—what?"

"Never fear, Mr. Galloway," I laughed. "Neither the one nor the other—though I fear it's good-bye to England and the Old World.



Where you actually are I shall have to await a more favourable moment to explain to you, You say my face is familiar. I suggest you cast your mind back to the illustrated papers of eight years ago. John Thorpe's my name, and I met your lunatic friend by chance."

"My hat!" said Galloway suddenly.

"Miss Marjorie Matthews was alive and well a few hours ago," I continued. "I expect and hope she is alive yet, and will continue so for many a year; but the other person——"

"Captain Crawley?"

"Yes. The fiddle-man shot him. It wasn't my fault, or anybody's fault so far as I can see. Perhaps this letter will help to clear matters."

I opened the last message from the Hubble-Bubble, and read it aloud to those people. He said:

"Dear Thorpe,

"Fortune has favoured me since last we met. I find myself in possession of enough emigrants to satisfy even my greed for raw material. I have been very bad of late—shocking bad—pains in my head and depression—but now I am better. Now I am better"—the writing, belying the Hubble-Bubble's words, began to get very wavery hereabouts—"and shall be all right soon. Better. I am only a poor Hubble-Bubble, but the end is near. End near. Peace.

"The boat is my boat. I have painted out the name for private reasons.

“I have the boat on account of the pressmen, of whom many millions are hunting for me in New York. There is a man in New York with a face like Crawley, but without the blood on it. I shall send these people in the boat—same as I sent myself in the tub, you remember—and then I can go back by myself and leave them. Got experiments down to a very fine point now, so the end must be near.

“Now for God’s sake listen to me. This is so hard to write, because of my head. This is—listen. I want to make sure that these people reach you all right, so I will go back to the Whistling Adit, and you must tell them all to be there so that I can see them. The day will be the anniversary of the day you and Miss Marjorie came through; and the time the same. I will be punctual. I will be punctual. But the end is near. The end——

“It is very hard to write this letter. If I do not come I will be dead. Last ditch now, and all inside my brain. Other people don’t see there is a battle at all. Other people don’t see *you*. Yet one is as close to them as the other. It will go on.

“Now I feel better. When I began this I was rotten—which may account for incoherence, but no time to alter. If I don’t turn up something has happened. I am an absent-minded chap, and have a feeling I’m going to make some incredibly obvious blunder one of these bright days. Do your best to explain matters to crowd.

Fear you will find gallant captain (R.N.) rather tough nut—curious intellectual type. Kind remembrance, and so forth.

“Yrs. in haste,

“Not Sir Thingummyjinks, as you

“thought, but plain

“Jasper Smith.”

“Well, that doesn’t explain much,” I said. “Perhaps it would be better for you to give me your own experiences first, and we can go into the other matters later. How would it be if you brought the rest of your ship’s company ashore, and let them voice their views? I expect they’re cursing at the delay as it is.”

Captain Seppings agreed to this, and Galloway pushed off the dinghy again. We besought them to sit down in a circle on the beach, and this gave me a chance to observe them closely.

Besides the three I have already described there were four others in the party. Mrs. Seppings, a slender, athletic-looking woman of perhaps forty, with greying hair and a humorous mouth and eyes, was the eldest. Next to her came Deker, a man of thirty odd with a pointed beard and spiky moustache. He was an American, and wore a solid clue to his nationality in the shape of a round hat of soft felt. With the exception of Mactavish he was the most dilapidated member of the band, his clothes being freely patched with the same hairy material whereof the Scot had wrought him breeches.

The remaining two were only girls—the daughters of Captain and Mrs. Seppings. They were respectively fifteen and seventeen years old at the time, and to describe them fully, in as few words as may suffice, they were both fair, both distinctly pretty and had been respectively nicknamed the “Patched” and the “Ragged” Flappers. “Rags” was the younger girl. She made more noise in the world than “Patches,” but I think “Patches” thought more. Their characters were written on their garments, and I suspected with justice that a large part of the few repairs “Rags” exhibited were done by the adoring Galloway with a sailmakers’ needle.

Altogether they were a queer-looking lot. They were frayed, and worn and tanned by the sun; but they were clean and, with the exception of the individual noted, tidy as might be. The Captain was a strict disciplinarian.

I hid my amusement at their shabby gentility, and let Galloway take up the tale.

## CHAPTER XXXI

“**H**OW much do you want to know?” began Galloway.

“How you came to meet the Hubble-Bubble—the fiddleman—and where?”

“We met him in the North Atlantic, last summer,” said Galloway. “Is that all the information you need?”

“Perhaps you had better tell me the incidents leading up to this singular meeting,” I suggested. “I do hope our mutual friend hasn’t been trifling with the Royal Navy.”

Galloway looked perplexed. “Suppose you know,” he began finally, “or at least I suppose you *don’t*—so I might as well tell you—that Itzovitch made himself Emperor of Nether Russia and the Coalition last June. I suppose the Revolution helped him, though they say it was mostly due to secret work by the Post-Christian Higher Moralists, and the Brotherhood of the New Era Democrats, who imagined they would gain private ends by inviting him in. They didn’t. We woke up to find Itzy in supreme control of far too much territory—plugging competitors right and left. That’s all by the way, however. I just mention it because, of course, it shook things up a bit and changed

the situation very suddenly—changed it for the worse for us.

“That’s how I came to be in the North Atlantic. You see I wanted to see *some* of the fun and, hang it all, I *was* a sailor. They wouldn’t hear of it at first, but finally some fellow decided it would cheer the Fleet up a bit, and keep them from broodin’ over their arrears. Funny thing, isn’t it, to think of *our* Government not having the money to pay its men. No wonder people are prophesying the end of the world——”

A gaggle of geese drove wedgewise to the north. Somehow we all turned to watch them dwindle and disappear against the background of the primeval forest. An early grasshopper chirruped :

“The world unto an end will come——

Umpety! Umpety! Umpety! Umm!”  
droned an early bumble bee as it bobbed in and out of the flowers. “It’s quiet here,” said Galloway.

“I was on board the *Cherokee*,” he continued. “I was to join my ship at Vancouver, and they were smuggling me out secretly with Sir Herbert Tyldesly-Wilkins as inner guard, and Captain Seppings to keep a general eye on me. Captain Seppings was my old commander on board the *Infuriated*, you know. We were caught in a fog off the Banks, and a Japanese submarine torpedoed us in the night.”

“The *Infuriated* was torpedoed?” I cried.

"The *Cherokee*, of course," said Galloway. "I suppose it was the Japanese that did it, for we saw them next day. They were hunting for *me*, but I hid—in the stern sheets, behind the women's skirts." He coloured slightly. "Had to, you know—no other alternative if I didn't want to be made a prisoner, and leave the rest to the tender mercies of the enemy. You're never sure where you are nowadays, they do such barbarous things. Seem to have lost all the old ideas."

"I wonder how they knew I was on board the *Cherokee*?" he broke off.

"Somebody must have split," observed the Ragged Flapper sagely. "I think——"

"Shut up!" said her sister. "Let him tell the yarn his own way. Who cares what *you* think?"

"I think Tiddley Winks must have split," pursued the unquenchable Rag. "I hate him!"

"I would like to hear about the sinking of the ship," I suggested. "I fear Sir Herbert is out of reach, so the question of his fidelity is not material."

"It was a sort of bump in the night," remarked Rags solemnly—she evidently considered her turn had now come—"and the voice of father saying unforgettable things in the alleyway. When he had finished his devotions we were hustled on deck in our nightgowns, and left to finish dressing there. Of course Patches had disappeared—she always does when she's wanted



not to—so father went below again to find her. He heard her hammering in the bath room, and the silly ass had locked the door, and it wouldn't come unlocked, so father had to kick it in. By the time he got back Snotty—that's Galloway—had joined us. He belongs to *me*."

The narrator was suppressed by her elder sister.

"I was driven into one of the lifeboats by brute force," continued Galloway peevishly. "Luckily, however, Sir Herbert found there wasn't room for himself—after he'd coerced me. I asked him if the Seppingses were off, and he said, 'Yes. I'll get a place myself in the next boat,' he said. 'Everybody else is off.' You see Gwennie is rather a pal of mine, so I naturally wanted to know. I don't think she's born to be drowned, I but wanted to make sure.

"They began to lower away, and just as we cleared the rail of the promenade deck I spotted her—them—under one of the electric lights, which hadn't gone out yet. 'What a fat liar Tiddley Winks is,' I said, and I naturally stood up and made a jump for it over the rail. Somebody on the boat—imagine it was one of the ship's officers—shouted to collar that man, but I had a happy thought. 'Want me pipe,' I said; and I shambled aft toward the steerage with my cap pulled over my eyes. The officer—who seemed busy—said I could drown and be—er—blowed in that case, so I waited until the boat was out of sight, nipped across to the

starboard promenade deck, through the smoking room, and joined the Seppingses. You were rather sick with me, sir, weren't you ? ”

“ I was,” grunted the Captain.

“ The next man to come,” proceeded Galloway, “ was Deker. He had raided three women passengers from the second cabin, and they were all carrying sample cases. The sample cases belonged to Deker. We found them very useful afterwards.”

The silent American smiled. “ I guessed I might do some business in the boats,” he said slowly, “ which shows we're all likely to be mistaken once in a while. They're *good* cigars though. You wouldn't find an agent like me travellin' for a firm that don't handle first-class stuff. Carry on, Mr. Galloway.”

“ Deker wanted a conveyance for his female friends and his cigars,” said Galloway. “ There were two extra boats on either side of the hatch on the forward well-deck—I think they stowed them there at the last moment on account of the *Cherokee* carrying more than the lawful number of passengers. She was quite a small ship, you know, but everything seems so upside down nowadays that it's largely a case of please yourself. Just as the lights went out Mactavish and three other men ran out below us and began to strip the tarpaulin off one of these boats. They were in the deuce of a hurry, and cursing like blazes, so it looked as if there wasn't much time left. ‘ It seems we've been overlooked,’ said

Captain Seppings. 'Let's get in here.' We went down and lent a hand with the boat.

"It was easy work launching her, for the deck was almost flush with the water by this time. The last thing I remember is the skipper cursing at us from the bridge and telling us to get a move on—we were shouting to find out if anybody else had been left aboard, but he seemed the only one. We just pushed off in time, and we heard the splash as he hopped in himself. I think he was picked up all right.

"Then we managed to lose the other boats in the fog."

"And met Mr. Jasper Smith, *alias* the Hubble-Bubble?" I suggested.

"Next day," said Galloway. "In the morning it was thicker than ever, and a submarine splashed up under our bows. A Jap lieutenant came out of the conning tower, and made kind inquiry for *me*. I've told you already where I was at the moment. Rags said I was in one of the big boats; and she wept—she *can* when she wants to—and said they were all frightened, and would like to be taken on board the submarine. Jolly smart of her, don't you think? They *couldn't* imagine we were concealing anybody with all the women howling to go on the submarine."

"Emily—that's Patches—nearly gave the show away," burst in the Ragged One again, "but mother played up like a good 'un, and so did Deker. Father is quite hopeless. We had to explain that he was one of the stewards, a little weak in

the head, and that he had been drinking. We said we were rather afraid of him."

"You bluffed 'em, anyhow," smiled Deker. "The Jap lootenant was real vexed that he couldn't be of assistance. 'Exigencies of war,' he said it was."

"We escaped from the Yellow Peril," continued Galloway hurriedly—for the captain was looking unhappy at the memory of the slur on his character—"and we continued in the fog for half that day. Then we heard a bell, and presently ran down the sound. It was coming from that yawl over there. There was only one man on board—expect you know who!—and he was tolling melancholy chimes—to keep the Press Boats from running him down, he said—in a fog that might well have suffocated a London Metropolitan policeman. When he had satisfied himself we weren't journalists he said we might come on board.

"You tell the rest, sir," he broke off. "You saw more of it than I did."

"Extraordinary fellow," began Captain Sepings. "Said he was glad to meet us, for we were all on the eve of beholding great events. Thought he was tight from his manner. Then he pitched my wife's bag overboard before I could prevent him, and I was naturally annoyed. I asked him what the devil he meant by it, but the chap only smiled and, by Jove, he was starting to sling the girls' things after it if I hadn't knocked him down.

"I asked him what the blazes he meant by jettisoning my wife's private property; and we had a bit of a discussion. Of course I made it pretty plain to him that I was not the man to stand any more of his tricks.

"He then unlocked the cabin door and went below. I was following him, but he motioned me back. 'One moment, please,' he said, 'and I will show you rather a remarkable thing.' He buzzed a sort of wheel he had lashed down on the table, and he took a fiddle out of one of the lockers. 'I'll have to be nippy,' he said, 'or the fog will damp the strings.'

"You may believe me or not as you please, but I'll eat my hat if that rascal friend of yours didn't come up on deck again and perform what I can only describe as a miracle—a miracle!"

"What sort of miracle, Captain Seppings?" I was trying not to smile.

"He—ah—played his confounded fiddle," explained the captain, "and the—ah—fog—the fog—cleared. Extraordinary sudden thing. We gave a lurch—gave a lurch—extraordinary thing—found ourselves drifting before light breeze from nor'-nor'-east. Bright sunshine. Ex—My theory is, fellow hypnotised us. Remarkable thing—what?"

"That wouldna account for the joggle," broke in the red Mactavish. "I wis watchin' the watter, an' the swells a' checkit t' run contrary-wise. Forbye there wis nae smirch o' fog on the horizon when we won free.

"It wis that sudden it would shock ye," he continued. "Ae moment we were in the thick an' chokkin' fog, an' the next we were alane upon the vasty deep."

Captain Seppings scowled at the interruption, but his wife laid her hand on his arm. Mactavish took up the tale.

"We scant the horizon," he said, "for the sicht o' a vessel or the ither boats, but saw nae sign. It was as bare as the fore end o' a' things when the Speerit o' God moved upon the face o' the watters. I mindit then, though there wis no parteecular item whereby ye could deeferentiate, that this wis no' the same sea. It wis mair in the nature o' an intueetion than a reducible hypothesis."

This Mactavish person, I afterwards found, had once held ecclesiastical ambitions. He was a fisherman by upbringing, and most other things by subsequent vagary of fortune.

"The wind bein' easterly," he continued, "we med sail for St. John's, Newfoundland, the Captain bein' unanimously electit commander. We were too astoundit to tak' heed to the lunattick—for so I judged him t' bee—till Deker gi'es a cry.

"'Dinna bring it back on us!' he skirls—meanin' the fog—an' he med as though t' seize him. The man had brocht his wheel on deck, an' was birlin' at it, wi' spairks flyin' a' ways. 'Haud yer peace,' he says, "'*Pairactum est*,'" an' wi' that he tak's a lick wi' his bow on yon fiddle-



strings, an' before ye could say 'knife' he's vanished intil thin air. A man ca'ed Keogh, that sat in the stairn sheets, mak's the sign o' the Cross, an' says he——"

" 'Glory be to God! He's burshted!' " interrupted the Ragged Flapper joyfully.

" But whether such was the case or no'," continued Mactavish, " we beheld him nevermore. But there wis the letter he wrote ye on the cabin table, an' I mind now he tellt the Captain it wid be t' our advantage to heid straicht for England an' sairch for John Thorpe. 'He'll be mair explicit than I've the time for,' he says; and wi' that he came on deck an' vanished—the way I'm tellin' ye. We med sail for Newfoundland."

It appears they did not find Newfoundland, although they overshot the supposed site of St. John's by something over a hundred miles. Then arose strong winds from the north-west, before which they were swept, suffering many hardships, for over three weeks. "There was nothing on board but ham and water biscuits," said the Ragged Flapper, "and besides that we caught fish sometimes. We felt horribly blue when the food began to give out."

"And the water," said Mrs. Seppings softly. "What with missing the land and the number of whales we saw—although we were being driven further south every day—George swore we were bewitched. You can imagine, Mr. Thorpe, what misery it was with thirteen people in one small boat. I am afraid the unlucky number was our



undoing. However, the gales seemed to blow themselves out at last, and the wind went round to the south again. We had been driven so far off our course by this time that George decided on trying for the Azores. Otherwise, we must die of thirst."

"Rather like looking for a needle in a haystack," remarked the Captain grimly; "but only chance left. No sextant or chronometer—apparently your friend navigated without 'em—and only the vaguest idea as to the latitude. Kept close hauled on the starboard tack four days, and then saw a bush floating, and Keogh swore he saw a land bird fly over the vessel. Came about, on the chance the bush had got adrift off the Azores and was following the current, as it would. Water was all gone by then, and it was only a question of a day or two more—Hum!"

He choked and patted the patched Emily on the shoulder.

"We sailed all day on the port tack," said Galloway, taking up the recital again, "and it was jolly dry work. Then I suggested hauling up into the wind a point or two. I don't know why, but Keogh and myself always seemed to be seeing the loom of the land to southward. Nobody else believed us at first, for we saw it all the way along the horizon, and our idea was that we were probably too far *south* in any case. Captain Seppings pointed out that, if it was land we were seeing, it must be a bally continent; but I said if Newfoundland had disappeared, how

were we to know what had happened elsewhere. Anyway, just for luck, we altered our course a bit to the south, just when it was getting dark. Gwennie—that's Rags, you know—said she was going to pray for a lighthouse to crop up; but seems to me if there was one already we would see it anyhow—what?"

"Was there one?" I asked.

"Not exactly a lighthouse," grinned Galloway; "but I have to admit we saw a light as soon as it got dark. Cheered us up no end."

"You saw a *light*?" I cried.

"Well, a glare would be a better word"—he glanced at Gwennie, who was bridling with visible pride at the successful issue of her supplications—"a sort of pulsating glow on the southern sky. Sometimes it died down, and sometimes it would flash up quite brightly. During some of the flashes we imagined we could make out mountains, and that made us more cheerful still—although thirsty. I wanted to wake Rags to show her, but Captain Seppings said better not until we were sure one way or another. I could hear her talking in her sleep through the skylight——"

"I was dreaming about rivers," explained the Ragged Flapper.

Galloway gulped. "The morning broke very clear," he said, "and it *was* land all right. Then it clouded over and began to rain; but we didn't mind that."

"You bet we didn't," said Deker.

“And I was kept busy all the morning wetting cloths for Rags and Patches,” said Galloway. “Everything that would catch water was on deck to get the drops; but the rain stopped before we had half got rid of our thirsts; but then the clouds lifted and we could see the land again.

“The wind fell light and we didn’t make it that day. We held on until we heard breakers in the dark, and so had to lie to. The breeze was still off-shore—what there was of it—and there were no more lights. It was jolly funny lying there and listening to the surf.

“It was a warm night and the stars were shining. Now and then we thought we could see the beach, but it was pretty dark to make things out. We could smell the fruit and flowers and so forth—rum sort of smell. There were no lights. Just black darkness and the sound of the surf.

“Just before dawn Keogh came to me. Keogh was on my watch, he used to be a bluejacket and was wounded at Helsingfiord. He said, ‘There’s a break in the sound, Mr. Galloway, the way ye’d say it was a harbour against us, or the mouth of a river, but it’s not wide enough for that, and it maybe a cable’s length from wan side to the other. I have the lead, sir.’

“I listened and, sure enough, the beggar was right. ‘Perhaps I’d better wake the Captain,’ I said.

“‘He’d not thank ye,’ said Keogh. ‘I have the lead.’

“ ‘He would not,’ I said.

“ ‘Indeed,’ said Keogh, ‘it’s little harm we’d take, sir, in the light air there is, and it off-shore. If we were in there now, and safe at anchor, wouldn’t we be knowing what’s happened and whether it’s Hell or Galway we’ve brought up against. And indeed, sir,’ he said, ‘the tongue that’s in me would make a fly paper jealous by the dint of the thirst I have. God knows it’s one great Hell of a dhrink I’m needin’, an’ the wind blowin’ light off-shore, an’ me with the lead. I have it in me hand, sir.’

“ ‘Well—we didn’t wake the Captain,” continued Galloway, and he laughed. “Keogh crawled out on the bowsprit with the lead and Deker kept a look-out for possible rocks. I ran her straight for the shore until I heard the breakers on either side of me, and then Deker sang out ‘hard-a-port,’ and I just put my helm over in time to prevent her bumping a big pinnacle. That frightened me a bit, but I let her fall away into the wind, and almost immediately we found ourselves in smoother water. The sound of the surf stopped as if the soft pedal had gone on suddenly, and instead we heard the noise of a waterfall and the croaking of frogs. I knew by that we had got inside the harbour and dropped anchor in about four fathoms of water, on a sandy bottom, and advised Keogh to desert before the Captain woke up. He said he was game to desert long enough to sample the waterfall, so we two slipped into the dinghy with an empty

breaker, and found a stream running out on to the beach. I didn't rouse the other watch——"

"You did not," said Captain Seppings. "You infernal rascals, I'd have only done my duty if I'd had you keelhauled, all three—trying to run my ship ashore for a drink of water. 'Pon my word!"

"It was Gwennie calling for it in her sleep, sir. I—I—fact of the matter, I sneaked in to the ladies' quarters and gave her some to quieten her. She never woke up—just swallowed it."

"How vastly improper," shuddered Mrs. Seppings. "Gwennie shall hear of this when I catch her alone."

"*I* never knew," complained the Ragged Flapper. "Did you kiss me?" she inquired brightly.

"Gwennie!" roared her mother and elder sister in unison.

"Well, he was an ass if he didn't," said Gwennie.

## CHAPTER XXXII

I HAVE often wondered as to what exactly were the sensations of that little party of castaways, when they first saw the Atlantean sunrise gild the craggy summit of Keogh's Peak, the green ring of the circular harbour shutting out everything save the faint echo of the surf. I have been to Atlantis—Deker named the continent, and I suppose he knew—and so far as I remember the entrance to the port is guarded by fifteen islands. One would imagine one was on a big round lake when inside. To the west Keogh's Peak rises five thousand feet from the water's edge, pine-crowned and stately, its flanks girdled with a belt of wild vine brake and matted thorn. On the eastern shore the forest runs down to salt water; but on the south—along the big river—the country is more open. Fields of arum lilies bloom along this watercourse, and the foothills to the east again are very fertile and very prolific. The yacht apparently anchored on this occasion within a few hundred yards of the first waterfall—that is to say, right under the steepest scarp of the Peak. The water cascades over a red and purple cliff, two hundred feet, and loses itself in the tops of lime and orange trees beneath. After their recent experiences I think the transition must have seemed like a leap in the dark



from the very Valley of the Shadow to Paradise itself.

"We med oor way ashore," said Mactavish, "and rejoiced in the fruitful vines an' the citrons o' the land; for I'm tellin' ye we were mair nor a bit, as ye micht say metaphorically, fed up wi' the life. There wis seemptoms o' scurvy amang us. A man ca'ed Pendarves had a verra painfu' leg, an' I wisna feelin' ower weel masel'. We bided in that land a' winter."

"By the waterfall?" I asked.

"Na, na! There wis some talk o't, till Miss Gwendoline gets near grippit by a leopard the second day. Gin Mr. Galloway hadna gone in against him wi' yin o' the twa axes we had aboard, he'd 'a' had her. Keogh comes rinnin' wi' an oar an' me wi' the ither axe, an' thegither the three o's prevalit against him—but it was an awfu' fecht. Look!"

He rolled up his sleeve to show a crooked blue scar about six inches long in the thick of his arm.

"Efter *that*," he said, "we biggit a hoose on the lairgest o' the islands—where there's timmer growin'—only veesitin' the mainland t' hunt—also two exploration pairties we med up."

"You did some exploring then, in spite of the animals?"

"Aye! Yin o' them cost the life o' Pendarves. He wis trampelt by a bison beast, an' I saw it dune; but we found oor way to Copper Mountain, as we ca'ed it, an' frae the summit thereof we beheld the smock o' a volcano t' th' extreme



south. That wid account for yon flashes we saw in the sky. We collectit native copper to the wecht o' sixty pun' an' cairried it six days back to camp. Efter the death o' Pendarves I had to cairry the lot masel'; but it wis worth it. Ye see, whiles we were awa' Keogh an' Deker climbed the mountain t' the east o' the harbour, an' penetratit t' the interior on the faur side; whaur there is alluvial cassiterite—tin oxide—a mineral wi' which Deker is fameeliarised by reason that he has travellt lairgely in Mexico. Yon's what we used in makin' bronze. It's no' a bad country, what wi' the copper an' tin, the fruits an' sugar-cane and tobacco; but there's ay drawbacks. Man, I greeted like a bairn when I saw Pendarves gang doon afore yon bison."

"That's the only comrade we lost," said Deker, in answer to my inquiry. "Keogh and Cunningham stayed behind when we decided to make *this* trip, and the other three ladies are with them. Yacht's too small to take twelve people decently; and some one had to look after the settlement. Do you smoke?"

I shook my head. "I used to," I said; "but fortunately I never took seriously to the habit. Otherwise I should have suffered."

"You try *me*," cried Peter, and dived for the proffered pouch. His lip dropped. "Ay haf no pipe," he remarked plaintively.

Deker drew a blackened clay of crude workmanship from his pocket. "That do?" he asked.

"What did you forge that steel out of?" asked Galloway, as Peter struck a light. I explained that we made our own iron, and Deker at once looked interested.

"Progressive bunch you folks seem to be. I introduced our lot to tobacco—which none of 'em had seen outside a can before—and Mac rustled the copper for makin' bronze; but we haven't entered the iron age yet in Atlantis."

"Where?" I asked.

"Atlantis—the continent we discovered. Guess it can't very well be anything else from the location. Fine place, but thinly populated—thinly populated, unless you count in the beasts."

"Well, you have a gun, haven't you?" I protested. "By the way, how did you get hold of that? The Hubble-Bubble's not keen on fire-arms for other people."

"That," said Deker, "was a ruse of war—in straight 'United States,' a piece of bluff. We have no gun. Now tell us where we are and how we got there."

I found myself in rather a quandary, but as well as I was able to do so I strove to give the gist of the Hubble-Bubble's ideas, and a recital of my own personal experiences, for their benefit. Deker listened attentively and nodded when I had finished.

"I *get* that," he said gravely. "I guess if you'd told me all this a year ago I'd have said something rude; but now, why——"

“ Say ! ” he cried, “ what does Mr. Swede here think about it ? ” and his eyes twinkled.

Peter explained—not without heat—that he was no Swede, but Lieutenant Peder Ommundsen, late of the Fälster Hussars, and Deker apologised.

“ Ay understan’,” continued Peter icily, “ dat Ay com by fourt’ dimenshion. Yon T’orpe say dat so, an’ vun yentleman may tak’ oder yentleman’s vord.”

And Captain George Seppings (R.N. Retd.) gave an audible sigh of relief and from that moment fell in line with Peter. I have never known either of these two to attempt to explain to the younger generation how they got here. They made it their unvarying rule to refer all questioners to me, and I have always been held responsible for the accuracy of the statement.

I feel that I am getting near the end of my story. My original idea, when I embarked on this task, was to put down John Thorpe’s own impressions of the early history of Marjorieland prior to the Settlement. I have, perhaps, been led away from this task by trifles ; but for those in search of more serious knowledge I hope to write another and more serious book. This is the “ Frivolous Book of John Thorpe.”

We arose from the beach and conducted our visitors back to Limestone Hollow—they were glad to stretch their limbs after the confinement on board the yacht. I walked most of the way with Captain Seppings, and he told me how they

had left Atlantis, some six weeks previously, to look for England and John Thorpe. He himself still cherished a despairing hope that he might find his own country as he had left it, but the unfamiliar coast line soon shattered this also. For the last ten days they had been cruising up and down burning flares of fibre steeped in oil—which makes a good smoke by day—and had almost decided to give up the search when some one sighted a “cross tree” made by Marjorie years before, when she had spent unwilling days of exile on the island. They landed, of course, and found a blaze beneath and a stonework inscription still visible in the grass. This heartened them up a bit until Mactavish was good enough to suggest that we—being personal friends of the man who had perpetrated this “dog’s trick,” as Captain Seppings called it—would most likely try to inflict further harm on them. For once in his life Captain Seppings stooped to duplicity and invented a purely fictitious gun. I was vexed to find they did not really possess one, for it would have been most useful, and might have served as an object lesson to the present generation.

So far the only firearm we ever (nearly) owned was the barrel forged for me by young Henry Mactavish and Peter ten years ago. It burst on being tested, and they both swore it was a waste of time trying to make another one. Pure laziness!

Henry was further amiable enough to speak

bitter words as to the waste of good blasting powder which would be engendered by the free use of these dangerous and unmanly weapons. The scoundrel has the "gift o' preachin'" and has done the cause of progress immense harm by his loquacious folly and short-sighted conservatism. I wish sometimes he could have stayed in Atlantis.

For the red James—his father—returned to the shadow of Keogh's Peak. His ostensible reason was to convert Keogh from Popery—which he denounces as a silly creed—but I think the more genial climate had a lot to do with it. Perhaps also he was a bit sick when Adela finally gave him the go by in favour of Deker. However, he promptly married Jane Ford of Atlantis, so it could not have cut very deep after all. I think he and Peter were just out to follow the fashion of the moment. Peter I have no sympathy for—having thought to the "twelve" maidens he was previously "attached by." I gloried to see him repent in dust and ashes at the feet of Emily Seppings; and to see his past conduct well rubbed in; and to observe his chastened demeanour since. She is just the sort of wife for Peter—very firm. Some men are like that—they need to have a wife who—

Ahem!

We abode the Rags-Galloway nuisance for several years—until Rags had reached nineteen in fact, which is older than most girls get married nowadays. Marjorie spoke severely to Rags

then; and Rags said her intentions toward Galloway were strictly honourable: she meant to marry him, say in about twenty years, unless she decided to remain single instead, for this was a serious matter. She had her own ideas on matrimony. Meanwhile, the world was an amusing place, was it not?

Two weeks later Rags went protesting to the altar. I tried to take her part by pointing out how Marjorie had been not unlike her once upon a time; but Marjorie held her inalienable right to change her mind, so she said, as she grew older. I don't know how she managed the affair. Case of diamond cut diamond I presume.

And the Seppingses? The Seppingses interested me more than all the rest. I was greatly alarmed lest the Captain might find the new life intolerable, having lived so long under entirely different conditions. Far from it! He settled down within a year, and is still remembered and regretted from Upper Lake to the Island, and thence to Port Atlantis. His last voyage was in the year 21, after which he was constrained to stay ashore and superintend the building of ships and such-like matters. His successor Galloway was the miscreant who brought young Henry Mactavish over, and the truth of the matter is Henry left Atlantis partly because he and his father argued so much that the other residents wished one of them to leave, and partly on account of blasphemy.

Mactavish the father, strange to say, was an



Episcopalian—not Church of England, but Scotch Episcopalian be it noted—and naturally enough brought across practically the entire Book of Common Prayer in his hard red head. According to its ritual and doctrine his family worshipped and believed—over against the Keoghs—that is to say all his family but Henry.

Henry, if you please, chose to develop a theology of his own which, horror of horrors, contained something suspiciously like the Doctrine of Predestination. The resultant row was awe-inspiring, and the peaceful inhabitants must have rejoiced indeed when Henry took his departure. I do not share their glee with them.

All these matters are rather outside the scope of this book. I pass on to the day of the anniversary.



## CHAPTER XXXIII

“SO this,” said Deker, puffing gently at his pipe, “is the place where Miss Marjorie landed this day eight years ago?”

“The time and the place,” I assured him, “although it looks as if the—er—Hubble-Bubble was overdue. I glanced at my watch—which I had brought out for the occasion—and compared it with Captain Seppings’. We were within five minutes of one another, though both were set from sun time by guess.

“Cornwall uses Greenwich time,” said Deker, who knew a little about everything. “Hubble-Bubble’ll have his watch twenty to twenty-five minutes ahead of us. Give him half an hour.”

“We’ll give the whole day,” chorused the settlers of Limestone Hollow. “But this is almost too thrilling,” added Mrs. Seppings. “Our nerves won’t stand it.”

Deker proposed the drafting of a Constitution as a suitable pastime, and the apportioning of posts under the Crown to those present. I remember Galloway voted firmly that he be left out, and Captain Seppings wanted to develop his latent skill as Minister for Agriculture. I saw that nobody had the slightest intention

of doing anything they were really fitted to perform, so referred the matter to Marjorie.

"I don't approve of Constitutions," said that lady. "It's like conditional wills and meeting trouble half way, and all that kind of worriment. If our descendants don't know enough to make suitable laws for themselves *I'm* not going to bother—are you, Mrs. Seppings?"

"No," said Mrs. Seppings.

"And I'm still Queen Marjorie, aren't I, Mrs. Seppings?"

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Seppings.

"Well then, there's no need to worry," explained Marjorie. "I'm absolute. I've got Jack and the Captain and Mr. Galloway to back me up—and Peter?"

Peter nodded. "Ay kill dem all ve you say, Miss Maryorie."

"And me," said Deker. "Miss Watkins—"

He paused abruptly. Miss Watkins was already a bone of contention.

It struck me as strange at the time. All these people, in the Old World, would have spoken of "Mrs." Thorpe and "Mrs." Quelch, yet here they spoke of Miss Marjorie and Miss Watkins just because we used the terms. We used the terms because Adela began it by calling Marjorie "Miss Marjorie," and to us she herself was always Adela Watkins, nothing more. It was a trick of speech, developed unconsciously, yet it changed an old-established custom. Custom is a weird thing. I recollect now how even Mrs.

Seppings became "Miss Grace" at last on the lips of the rising generation—just from force of custom—just because the Hubble-Bubble once told Adela to go and look for "Miss Marjorie." Adela did it.

"Well beloved subjects," said Marjorie, stifling a yawn, "Hubble-Bubble is shockingly overdue."

"Perhaps he's forgotten us," suggested Mrs. Seppings.

"I think he may have," smiled Deker, "if what I've been figuring on is correct.

"Tell me," he continued, addressing his remarks to myself, "when that chap left us on the boat, where would he land?"

"Why in the same place as he—Good heavens, man! Do you suppose——"

"Well, we'd left our own original ship's boat a mile or two astern in the fog," drawled Deker. "It's pretty hard to suppose anythin' else. I guess he was absent-minded that time. Could he swim?"

"I don't know?" I said. There was a breathing silence, and then Marjorie used the words I had heard her use—not far from where we sat—eight years before.

"Poor Hubble-Bubble," she said. I expect that was his elegy and his coronach. We never saw him more.

And now I am indeed at the end of this tale; for what more is there to tell? How Captain

and Mrs. Seppings were blessed or cursed with a man child in late middle-age—and spoilt it, accordingly? How I made the trip to Atlantis and met Keogh? How we grew vines from Atlantean seedlings, and made good wine? Or perhaps the growth of the sugar trade would be of interest?

No. There is not much more to tell that I can see, and I even fear that I am wasting good parchment as it is. Who of all the heathen around me—save young Julius Quelch—will bother to read Old John Thorpe's Book?

I live here very happily in a house that is masonry in the lower story, and timber above. My walls are hung with pelts, and I have soft carpets of deerskin. There is also the clock, which has, indeed, but one hand—the hour hand of course—and must have the weight hauled up daily to make it work; but it was made in many years' hard work for Marjorie by Peter, so we value it the most of all our things. Further, on summer nights, I can hear sometimes the clucking of the big trip-hammer at Deerford, and from my window I can see the lights twinkle in the windows of the houses between West Meadow and the forest. The people, all of whom I know by name, pass to and fro on the main road below this, my window, of Limestone Hollow—young men on horseback herding the tumultuous white cattle to graze on the downs; ox waggons bearing iron and charcoal to Deerford or piled with hay, salt, or catch of sea-fish;

Henry Mactavish walking to his work eliciting doleful cries from his dismal Caledonian instrument of "music"—and when the weather gets chilly I just shut my window, which has bulls'-eye panes of real glass, and write my book or make bows.

Marjorie came to me fifteen years ago, seemingly rather distressed. She said, "It's no good, Jack. I'm a back number. It's perfectly ridiculous an old woman like me having to run from a bear." She threw her bow in a corner—where it has remained—and seemed very upset. "I'll go fishing," she said presently. "I'm still pretty, aren't I?"

"You are still pretty," I said. There was no one to hear us.

I was vexed at Marjorie's disappointment, and that night I had another strange dream. I dreamt that the Hubble-Bubble came to me and showed me a thing like a "cake basket" with tiers and tiers of circular worlds one above the other. On some of these shelves little people ran about, and rivers ran to little seas, factories smoked and ships sailed out from busy, dirty harbours—when you looked closely each miniature world seemed to expand and the closer one looked the larger it became. On other of the shelves, however, was a state which I cannot describe. It was somewhat like vague "fairylandish" visions of my childhood—beautiful, yet such as could not be understood until seen and known; and the faint comprehension of it

lost with the awakening. Here, moreover, came old companions, Adela, the Seppingses, older friends of the Old World ; and, oh, how they ragged me !—they would appear to be in possession of some deep subtle joke I did not understand. I saw many a face—some of them faces described in these pages—I was prone to imagine lost for ever. I do not remember seeing Michael, but perhaps he was there in the background, or perhaps not.

Henry Mactavish will say this was mere hallucination—whatever he means to imply by that term. Of course it was a working of my own brain. When one stood well off from the “cake basket” it developed wicker legs—was in fact the identical article that once adorned my mother’s drawing-room long years ago. A cake basket having cakes. When the Hubble-Bubble told me to look closer ; behold the other thing.

I prefer to believe that here was a finite three dimensioned conception of an infinite indefinable thing.

Then my dream changed suddenly to a grey glimpse of oily fog-wreathed swells upon a lonely sea. I saw the Hubble-Bubble swimming slowly and feebly ; and his face was sometimes twisted by his crooked, inscrutable smile ; and again it was mad with the fear of death. I seemed to follow that lone swimmer with my eyes ever on his face—that face which was alternately smiling and agonised. Once he spoke. He merely said

“Oh, God!” in an almost conversational tone. Presently he sank, and the water bubbled over his head. He struggled to the surface again, and again his strength gave out. Finally he sank and did not rise. At the last I cannot say which of the two expressions was on his face.

THE END





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